

EXPLOSIVE RUNES



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Editor in Chief - Nimlos
Assistant Editors - Grogg Tree & jj_wolven

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Explosive Runes*!

I'd like to take the opportunity of this soapbox to express two things. First, my tremendous admiration and respect for all the members of the community who work so hard for each issue of *Explosive Runes*. Second, my tremendous regret I have to step down from the position of editor.

Don't get me wrong, *Explosive Runes* is fun. I spent quite a few years working in publishing, and getting the chance to helm a project like this, marrying two things (gaming and publishing) that I've devoted an embarrassing amount of my life to, seemed like a great and fun opportunity.

But times change and the unbeatable demon known as Real Life has risen from the fiery depths. Well, perhaps not quite so dramatic, but as I'm in the midst of starting up a new business I just can't manage to make the time available for *Explosive Runes* any longer. For a time, I entertained the idea of struggling through, of managing to do both on top of, well, everything else, but eventually had to admit to myself that was a bad idea.

Remember what I said before about my admiration and respect for everyone who works on this magazine? Well, trying to hang on here when I clearly didn't have the time to would be doing them a disservice. In fact, I've already been absent more than I should and they've stepped up quite capably to take up the slack.

I'm not walking away completely, but as of this issue, I'm no longer running the show. That I pass on to my capable assistant editor Grogg Tree. He's more than proven himself ready and willing for the position, and I wish him the best of luck with it.

Roll 'em!

Nimlos



Rumors in the Tavern

News and Events from our Community

The Crystal Ball

A Look into the Future

HALL OF FAME

It's one of the biggest events of the year here at DnD Online Games and it's coming soon.

Every year, community members nominate the best games on the site for inclusion into the exclusive ranks of the Hall of Fame, but only a few make the final cut.

Remember, you have to be a Community Supporter to vote in the final round to determine which games make it and which games don't, so if you're not already a Community Supporter, now's the time to start.

EASTER EGG HUNT

It's an annual tradition at DnD Online Games,

and it's coming back this year - the Easter Egg hunt.

The Easter Bunny will hide Easter eggs throughout the site, leaving behind a trail of clues to follow. Can you find all the eggs and identify the Easter Bunny? Keep your eyes on the Announcements page for more details and get ready for a fast-paced (and often frustrating) hunt through the pages of the site.

CSEA

The Community Supporter Exclusive Adventures are going strong and getting stronger. If you're interested in taking part, please visit the forum by clicking [here](#). As the name indicates, these games are available only to Community Supporters.



Community Supporter Appreciation

Community Supporters are one of the backbones of DnD Online Games. Not only do they enjoy a variety of special privileges, their annual contribution is a big part of what makes all this possible. The following people are those who have become Community Supporters or renewed their membership since our last issue.

AximusLokar, Benoni, bulbaquil, Calden, CalynCorr, Croakamancer, Demogorgon, didiggy, dimitri domovoi, earth-dragon, Fumbles, Genocide Device, Isthon, JSteel, Kittenmancer, kyo, Peleus, Peter172, Raist, RuneColnor, Solomon777, Tegh, the1johnson, TheSmell, Troy, Venom656, WoLT, Ytterbium

JOIN THEIR RANKS! CLICK [HERE](#) TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT BEING A COMMUNITY SUPPORTER!

The Trophy Case

Who's Won What and Why

IRON DM 2011

After a competition every bit as rough and grueling as those of years past, Melchior was crowned the Iron DM winner for 2011. You can read our exclusive interview with him in this issue of Explosive Runes, and you can read his winning entry (along with the excellent work of the other competitors) by clicking [here](#).

POST OF THE YEAR

After a year of judging monthly entries, the crew of the Post of the Month contest crowned the first winner of the Post of the Year award. The winner was [mountainbound](#), for his exceptional work introducing a new chapter of his Celtic-themed game.

POST OF THE MONTH

One of our regular contests on DnD Online Games is the Post of the Month contest, which continues to highlight some of the finest work by site members on a monthly basis. At the end of the first year of the Post of the Month competition, mountainbound was crowned with the first Post of the Year title. But it's a new year, and the field is wide open.

The most recent Post of the Month winners are:

The winner for October was [DraconigenaArma](#).

The winner for November was [Malleus Malaprop](#).

The winner for December was [Benoni](#).

The winner for January was [Admin Chuck](#).

The winner for February was [mad_gondsman](#).

Clicking on the name of any of the winners will take you directly to their winning entry.

STAFF CHANGES

The team at *Explosive Runes* would like to extend congratulations to TheChuck on his promotion (?) from moderator to full-fledged administrator. In keeping with his newfound position and power, he's already staged a [coup](#). We all saw it coming.

We'd also like to say thanks to AxeMan (aka Amy) who has just stepped down from his own administrator position. You're one of the good ones, Amy. Thanks for all the hard work you've put into the site, our home away from home on the Web, and we hope to see you in a few more games soon! Don't spend your newfound free time on real life!



TO DM OR NOT TO DM

BY RONARS CORRUPTION

Descent into Madness

Aberrations are described, as a creature type, as something that looks or thinks significantly different from normal terrestrial life. The first part of that is easy - something that looks much different. But, the second part is so much harder. Something that *thinks* differently than a human might.

My name is RonarsCorruption, and I've been a Dungeon Master for over ten years, here to give you some tips on how to make a great game, and how to run it smoothly.

Because of their differences in thinking, aberrations are one of the hardest creature types to run in a game. Because, of course, you don't think like an aberration, you think like a person (no matter how twisted you consider yourself to be). Fortunately, there aren't many of them that ever want to talk to the PCs, making your life a little easier, but it's best to be prepared in case the PCs ever do decide to strike up a conversation.

The easiest way to make the creature seem alien is by using strange grammar. Take Yoda, for instance. Despite

his mostly human appearance, he is unmistakably alien in the way he speaks. Pick some peculiarity and stick with it. A creature that is part of a race with little individuality might never call someone by name - addressing your characters all by "human." A creature with no written language might only use those core words, much like a barbarian. A single linguistic quirk can make all the difference in making a believable aberration.

But once your players are talking with these alien monsters, you'll shortly realize that they have needs and wants too. Because they're not human or human-like, these needs and wants should probably also be different. Where our primary concern is usually the survival of ourselves or our family, an alien might think otherwise. Hive-minded aberrants might sacrifice themselves for the leader of their hives. Some crea-

tures might find that they actually seek death once they reach a certain point in their life-cycles. Some might seek only to be disemboweled, so they can pull their body together in a new, more gruesome form.

But, that's not really a need is it? It's a want. For us people, and nearly every fantasy creature, we want few things. Happiness, money, maybe sex. Aberrants probably don't. Try to think of something different - wood, for instance, or

coal. Something an adventurer normally wouldn't care less for. That can become your aberration's want. Of course, you could also pick something more gruesome and vicious, like brains or flesh or toenails, but presumably if it was interested in gathering the PCs' brains, it wouldn't be talking with them, unless it was biding its time.

No matter what you do, you're not going to be able to think like an alien. But you can make your PCs feel like they're interacting with one. Hopefully, these little tips will help keep your players engaged, no matter how weird the things they come up against are.



Iron DM 2011 Winner

Interview by Grogg Tree

So, the all-powerful and all-mighty 2011 Iron DM Contest came to an end since our last issue. With the overwhelming number of people that struggled to get a spot, your faithful interviewer took a spot amongst the judging panel this year. Amid the crazy ingredients and strict deadlines, there were many great contestants that were eliminated. As the final gavel fell from Chairman Haga's hands (played by hvg3akaek), Melchior was left standing as the champion. I know give the first interview from our DM contest's reigning winner.

How long have you been playing D&D?

I first played D&D when I was in middle school, almost 13 years ago. After middle school however, I stopped playing for a long time. I picked the game back up around seven years ago, and have been playing more or less continuously ever since.

Why do you play D&D?

To tell a story. Growing up I was always a bit of a bookworm, and I always enjoyed video games with expansive stories and well-developed characters. D&D provides a medium with which to tell my own stories.

And of course, because it's simply fun.

How long have you been DMing?

About seven years.

Which editions have you played?

The very first games I ever played were 2nd edition. I remember the rules being complicated and difficult to understand, though I imagine that has more to do with my youth at the time than anything. Since then I've played 3rd, and 3.5, as well as Pathfinder. I honestly never much cared for 4th.

What is your favorite conflict/fight and why?

I remember in one of the very first games I DMed, the party was traveling on the ocean, and I had them get attacked by pirates. For the most part the fight was going normally. Earlier I had described the ship the party was on as having cannons, so the fighter decided he would

run down and start firing the cannons into the enemy ship at point blank, which the pirates of course retaliate in kind. Fast forward a few turns and there are now sizable holes in both ships.

The fighter then decides to jump across the gap into the pirate ship. In full plate. In the middle of the ocean. Miraculously he actually made the rolls to do so, and thus managed to avoid a watery grave. Once inside the pirate ship, the fighter killed the few pirates nearby and ran around stealing all the pirate's treasure. So while the rest of the party was desperately trying to repel the boarders, including the Pirate Captain boss, while a

man down, the fighter was robbing the pirates blind. At some point the pirate ship caught fire and began to sink. As the rest of the party on their ship was preparing to dislodge the burning ship and escape, the fighter comes screaming up from within the burning ship carrying a massive chest of gold, just barely jumps back onto the ship and the group escapes. The rest of the group were furious with the fighter and the whole ordeal was hilarious.

What is your favorite puzzle/challenge and why?

In one game I was playing (I was not the DM this time), our group had to get through this underground dungeon beneath a giant tree. The dungeon itself was not all that long but the paths would open and close,

and walls would grow over the entrances as you moved through it. The group inevitably got divided as we had to move through all the paths in order to flip the right switches simultaneously. The puzzle was interesting, and it took us awhile to get the right pattern down. There were also a few battles that we each had to fight alone, but they were weak enemies and for the most

If you were to give one piece of advice to a new DM, what would it be?

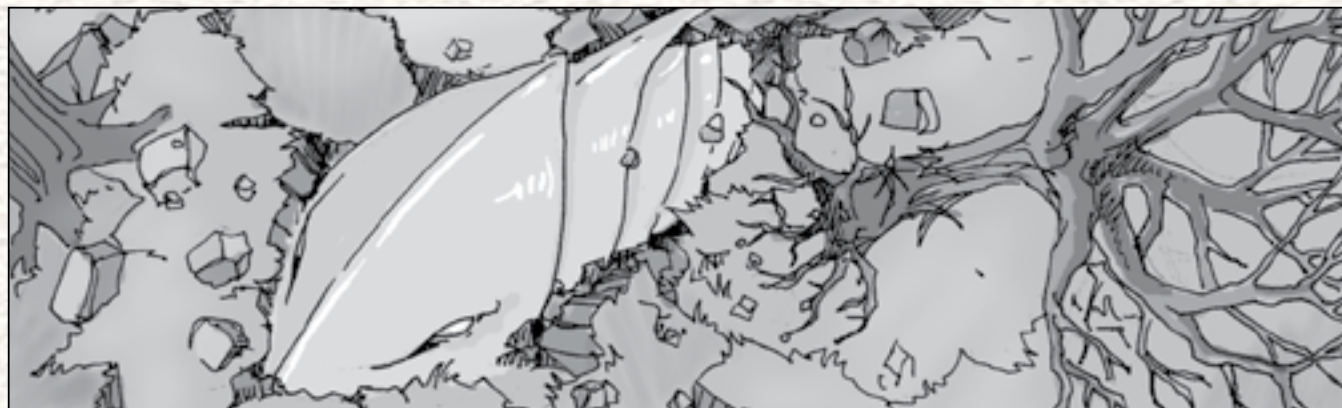
Be wary of biting off more than you can chew. I have started some games with the intention of creating this grand epic story only to realize there are only so many hours in a day and there is no way I can keep up the pace required to make it work forever.

part we all made it through unscathed. Except our rogue. Throughout the entire game our rogue had repeatedly been comically useless. I don't know if he was just unlucky or what, but his rolls were consistently awful. When the rogue ran into a pair of CR 4 Shamblers (we were all lvl 12 at this point), true to form he was unable to kill them, and simply fumbled and dropped his weapon. After a short fight, the rogue was dead, turned to mulch.

Work with your players, you're all in this together.

Is this your first attempt at competing in Iron DM?
Yes, this was my first time competing.

What did you like most about the competition? Least?
Getting the ingredients, and the planning step. I enjoyed trying to develop a coherent adventure using some extremely weird ingredients. My least favorite part was the waiting. Once the submission was in, I



It was a fitting way for the poor rogue to die. We were all playing fairly evil characters that game, and so the most the rogue's death earned from any of our characters was a "Hey, where's Bill?" We then shrugged our shoulders and left the rogue's corpse forever lost in that maze.

What is your favorite class and why?

Bard. Mechanically, I have always been partial to skill-based classes, and the bard offers a different approach than the rogue. Roleplay wise, I find bards fun to play. I enjoy making up various legends and tales and playing a bard gives one ample opportunity. It can be hard to come up with new stories over and over, and I always try to make sure I don't override something the DM has already established, but I always enjoy it.

What ratio do you tend to follow (RP/Combat/Puzzle)?

I usually try to fit to a 50/30/20 scale. This can be shuffled around as need be, but generally I keep combat pretty low, if only because combat in a PbP game is a ponderous beast.

If you were to give one piece of advice to a new DM, what would it be?

Be wary of biting off more than you can chew. I have started some games with the intention of creating this grand epic story only to realize there are only so many hours in a day and there is no way I can keep up the pace required to make it work forever.

would just read it over, second guessing myself.

How did you feel when they finally announced the winner?

Relieved. I spent much of the week before the results were displayed worrying about my submission. The poll only made it worse. I swear I must have checked it at least five times an hour, to see if anyone else had voted.

How did you feel about your stories?

My third story, The Ivory Chef, was probably my favorite. I was a little disappointed that I essentially won that round by default because my opponent was so late, I would have liked to get a better critique from the judges. I found my second story good also. My first was all right, though it suffered from word limit constraints and from me not really knowing what the contest entailed. Ironically my fourth, the championship round, was probably my least favorite. Overall I thought I did a good job though. In hindsight there are changes I would make to all of them but I was happy with them.

Which was your favorite story (all competitors/rounds)?

As much as I would like to say one of my own stories, my favorite story of the competition was ValidUser-Names' Second Round entry: Shifting Loyalties. I have always been partial to that sort of setting, and I remember reading it and thinking that I would love to play in that game. And also being really worried, because I was going to have to go up against him myself

in the next round.

Do you plan, at this time, to compete again next year?

Possibly. Barring any unforeseen obstacles I will probably enter. What I would really like to do however is be a judge.

Any changes that you'd like to see to the process?

I would like to see some more consistency in the judging. Particularly in regards to the contest rules. For example, there were several entries that were over the word count, with no mention by most of the judges. In my opinion if you're going to set limits like that the judges have to enforce them. And oftentimes the 'penalty' for going over was negligible. Considering how often points were deducted for not giving enough detail or plot holes that could not be explained due to word constraints, it generally seemed to be better to take a 1 point hit on word count to give yourself more time to explain, which really negates the point of a word limit.

Any other comments on Iron DM in general?

Despite some problems, I really found it to be great fun. It was an interesting challenge, trying to come up with a story that made any degree of sense considering some of the bizarre ingredients that were given.

If I take a look inside your refrigerator what would I find?

Things that look back.

What is your favorite book?

Ethel the Aardvark goes Quantity Surveying.

If Hollywood made a movie about your life, whom would you like to see play the lead role as you?

Anthony Hopkins.

If someone wrote a biography about you, what do you think the title should be?

Soaring Vengeance 2: Bloodsport. A Melchior Story.

If you had only six months left to live, what would you do with the time?

Write my biography. It sounds amazing.





This massive hexapod creature is a mass of wiry, matted fur nearly ten feet tall.

HWRIDIF CR 14

XP 38,400

CN Huge aberration

Init -2; Senses blindsight 15 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19

Aura stench (DC 27; 15 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 33, touch 6, flat-footed 33 (-2 Dex, +27 natural, -2 size)

hp 230 (20d8+140); fast healing 5

Fort +13, Ref +4, Will +10

Defensive Abilities unusual vitals; DR 10/silver

OFFENSE

Spd 60 ft., climb 40 ft.

Space 20 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Melee 2 stomps +21 (2d6+8)

Special Attacks

distraction (DC

27)

STATISTICS

Str 26, Dex 6, Con

24, Int 28, Wis 2,

Cha 11

Base Atk +15;

CMB +25; CMD

33 (41 vs. trip)

Feats Awesome

Blow, Cleave,

Greater Bull

Rush, Improved

Bull Rush, Im-

proved Natural

Attack (stomp),

Improved Over-

run, Iron Will,

Power Attack,

Run, Weapon

Focus (stomp)

Skills Acrobatics

+21, Climb +21,

Escape Artist

+21, Intimidate +23, Knowledge (arcana) +29, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +29, Knowledge (local) +32, Knowledge (planes) +29, Perception +19, Spellcraft +32, Stealth +21, Survival +19, Swim +31

Languages Common (cannot speak), Aklo

Unusual Vitals (Ex): a Hwridif's internal organs are vastly different from those in most creatures. It has a 25% chance of ignoring any precision damage - such as sneak attacks - or critical hits.

This massive hexapod creature is a mass of wiry, matted fur nearly ten feet tall. Insects, slime and small plants grow amongst the hair, giving off a most unhygienic stench.

Despite the huge frame and thick fur, a hwridif is a very intelligent creature, in an animal sort of way. Beneath their torso is a single mouth, used to scoop up debris from the ground - typically common ores and metals - which it then mixes with its own internal fluids for several days before excreting out another, smaller hwridif.

A hwridif absorbs all the nutrients it needs from the teeming life within its thick, matted fur. Should a hwridif find itself deprived of air or water for too long, it finds itself affected similarly to mortal creatures, though rarely can it recover when the creatures within its fur have died off.

An average hwridif stands nearly ten feet tall and fifteen feet across at the knee, though the body of the creature is only a few feet around, slung low between the legs. A fully matured hwridif weighs 3,000 lbs.



City of Frost

by Hallstadt

Cat-eye Jack sighed as he watched the flames sparkle and roar in the fireplace. The warmth and comfort of the inn only reminded him that where he was going he would know no such luxuries, but only the cold sting of frost.

And then there was the matter of Catryn, who even now sulked and stared at him accusingly. He'd never meant to become so involved with the bar-wench - he'd only been looking for a place to sheathe his sword for the night, so to speak - but now, as he prepared to bid the girl farewell, he had to admit he felt a twinge of regret. He would miss her.

She watched him as he made a final check of his supplies: rations enough for two weeks' travel, thick-furred clothes for winter climes, and sundry items for life on the road. Her face knitted into the sternest expression he'd ever seen her wear as she put down her serving tray and came to join him on the bench before the fire.

"If you insist on chasing monsters in the northern steppes like some fool potboy, then at least take this to keep you warm in the freezing nights." She handed him a slender metal flask adorned with the hallmark of the Raven's Roost, the tavern in which they now sat. "And let it remind you that you left a good woman and a warm room for this fool's errand!"

Cat-eye shrugged, almost laughing inwardly, though his face remained appropriately solemn. He didn't know what to say to her. It felt good to be wanted, but he was not ready to resign himself to a life of domestic drudgery. And a bounty on giants at 500 gold dragons apiece made the northern steppes the next sensible destination on his rambler's road. Instead of responding with words, he uncapped the flask and sniffed the spirits within - a fine whiskey from the scent of it - and smiled at her. She harrumphed formidably and rose to her feet.

"Well, Mr. Cat-eye Jack, this is farewell then."

"Farewell, Catryn, you have been good to me, and I will

treasure the time we spent together as if it were the rarest of gems. And I am sure I will thank Rhia, goddess of luck, for this whiskey in the cold northern nights!"

She smiled briefly, then quickly turned it into a frown and spun on her heel to walk away from him and return to her serving duties.

Cat-eye turned away from her, a pain he could not fathom rising in his chest, and walked out the tavern door, headed for adventure and the lonely road that would take him there.

Cat-eye had heard from travelers around the fire at camps and inns throughout the Western Marches that you would know you had reached the northern steppes when you could see nothing but snow stretching out endlessly in every direction. After three days travel on horseback, snow draped pines lined the trail around him and only occasional patches of dark earth marred the solid veil of white as far as he could see. "I must be getting close," he thought, pulling his thick fur cloak closer about him to keep out the mounting chill. No snow fell during his first day's ride through that snow-bound land, but even though the sun shone sharp and pale in the shock-blue sky above, the chill wind warned of storms to come.

Even here, at the steppes' southern edge, where the Stonehold Mountains had just become visible on the northern horizon, Cat-eye was vigilant. Giants and their kin, or any number of other, lesser creatures known to inhabit this frost-scarred land might appear at any moment, and he knew he must be ready if he were to survive this journey. He made a quick check of his weaponry to further prepare himself for the possibility of combat.

In addition to his usual twin daggers, which he wore sheathed on either side of his torso for easy retrieval, he had also brought a much larger blade, a northerner's great-sword, which was strapped to his steed. He had purchased the blade for a reasonable price in Maerholm, from Catryn's uncle, a gifted sword smith. If he returned from his journey with the head of a giant, he would see the sword's price repaid tenfold. But though the Duke of Maerholm had put a price on giants because herdsman had reported them wandering dangerously close to human lands, the frost choked plains lay still and silent.

Hours later, Cat-eye caught himself struggling to focus,

as the monotonous motion of his horse and the unbroken sameness of the landscape threatened to lull him into a trance. In these desolate lands, he did not feel the need to hide the strange glass eye he wore, so no eye patch covered the crystalline orb with the swirling, animate design like a feline's pupil at its center. But even with the superior vision of the strange glass eye, he felt as if hours of riding had dulled his senses. He rubbed his one good eye and stopped his mount for a moment to recollect himself.

As he scanned the horizon, reminding himself of the possible danger all around him, he squinted at some half-glimpsed shimmering outline in the distance. Warily, he climbed down from his horse and tied it to a solid low hanging branch of a nearby pine. Drawing the great sword from its sheath, he trudged off the narrow trail on foot, all the while keeping his eyes on the odd play of lights in the distance.

At first it seemed as if he would never reach the lights, as one cannot reach the stars by walking round the earth, but as he pressed on, his horse visible now only as a speck in the distance, he saw that great spires of ice shone several furlongs away. But there was something else there as well, something closer, which startled him and made him doubt his own eyes.

Between him and the eldritch structures a human sized form stood, ghostlike, and beckoned with a naked, pale hand.

Cat-eye walked like a man in a dream toward the unknown figure; he felt as if his limbs moved almost beyond his control, and as though he were watching himself walk from a distance. It was only when he willed himself to stop for a moment to regain his senses that he became aware of a weird music, a single high female voice singing flurries of notes like the ringing of temple bells. But the more he tried to focus on the music, the fainter it became, until he was not sure he had really heard it or simply imagined it.

He stopped and studied the figure in the distance. Could this be the source of the unearthly tune? Now that it was nearer, he could see that the shape was distinctly female, yet oddly nebulous--the way fish look beneath deep and swiftly flowing water. Cat-eye had heard of the snow-blindness, and he hoped he was not already suffering its effects. As he struggled through the loose packed snow toward the mysterious person and the unknown spires beyond, he called out to her, for he was not sure she had noticed him and he wanted to speak with her to see if she knew aught of

giants.

In response the girl - for he could see now that she was indeed a young and shapely woman - smiled and laughed, a high, melodic, tinkling sound, like ice shattering. Cat-eye rubbed his good eye again and cuffed himself upon the head. "Am I dreaming?" he asked, and he smacked himself once more, a bit harder, to be sure that he had not dozed off in the saddle, or worse, fallen from his horse and fallen asleep in the freezing snow.

But whatever he saw before him, it was no dream, though it would have been easier for him to believe if it had been - the girl stood nearly naked upon the frost-white sheets of snow, her only vestments a single wisp of diaphanous sky-blue cloth wrapped loosely about her.

As Cat-eye neared her, she laughed again, and turned toward the glistening spires. He stumbled through the snow, trying to keep up, and shouted, "Wait! I would have words with you!"

Her only reply was tinkling laughter as she continued to move with surprising speed. It was then that he noticed that while he trudged through the snow with great difficulty, she moved effortlessly upon its surface, leaving no trace on the unbroken layer of white as she ran onward toward the strange structures in the distance. The great sword clutched before him, he continued cautiously, though he felt almost as if something beyond his ken compelled him to travel on toward the oddly shimmering spires.

Several staggering steps later, he stopped to survey the structure, which was now little more than a stone's throw away. The strange girl had been a sight almost beyond belief, but his first clear glimpse of those ghostly spires sent his mind reeling. Before him lay a spire-topped citadel of tremendous size, replete with ornate designs whose detail and quality he had never seen in all his travels. Not even the ancient Camyrian temples or the stone carvings of Kalish could equal the complexity of those eldritch spires. But the strangest thing about the citadel was not the intricacy of its design, but its composition - for it was no tower of simple stone. The entire thing was composed of translucent, sparkling ice.

So unearthly was that citadel that Cat-eye Jack could scarce believe his eyes. And the way it caught the sunlight made the whole of the thing seem to flicker and gleam like a thing out of some mad vision or fantastic dream. But still the girl's spritely form bid him

to follow, and so he did, lurching as he went, for the cold had begun to numb his limbs in spite of his thick fur garments.

It seemed to him almost as if the walls of the citadel

grew up around him as he found himself standing within a grand courtyard surrounded by an enormous frozen wall. It troubled him that he could not recall passing through the citadel's gate, but still some odd compulsion drove him to walk on, following the girl who still laughed merrily and ran ahead, carefree in her nakedness as if she walked on spring grass under sunny skies, when in fact she tread

on frozen ground and clouds began to swarm the sky above like vultures over a scene of recent slaughter.

Into the citadel she led him, till at last he came to a grand room with two massive statues of warriors carved of ice like the citadel walls themselves, and having about them the same meticulous attention to detail. His limbs burned with artificial warmth, but in fact that room was so cold that he could scarcely breathe, and he began to feel quite weak. At long last, the girl turned, a broad smile on her snow-white face.

As he looked upon her, a strange change came over her, and where she had once looked young and pleasant, she now looked ancient and stern beyond measure, like some cold demon queen come from the icy depths of the netherworld. He waited for her to speak, a strange, chill silence gripping his tongue. For long moments she only regarded him with eyes of the coldest blue, colder than ice, colder than steel. At long

last she spoke, and her voice whistled and hissed like a winter wind blowing through the treetops.

"You have wandered too far into our realm, Cat-eye Jack, or Jack Fleetfoot as you are known in other

realms, and all because a petty human noble has seen fit to put a price upon the lives of my kin! But you will find that he holds no power here! Here the blizzard and the hoarfrost reign! You have proven strong thus far - the cold has not yet frozen the blood in your veins - and so I shall not kill you outright. Instead you shall have a chance to fight for your life, so long as you swear never to come to this place again!"



Jack boggled, "Am I to fight you then, lady? If lady you be?"

Her laughter came as an avalanche of cruel mockery, "If you can, then strike me dead where I stand!"

Inexplicably, she moved closer toward him, mere steps away from the range of the great sword he still gripped with both hands. But as he tried to step back from her, to tell her he had no quarrel with her if she would simply let him leave, he found that frost as hard as stone had grown up around his legs and held him fast.

"No, you will stand and fight, but you shall not fight me!" She sang, a loud and piercing cry, full of all the sorrow of that frost blasted land, and as Jack listened, he became certain that it was she who had sung the mesmerizing tune he had heard before he entered this cursed place. Her cry seemed to shake the massive walls of the place, and after a few moments, the two

statues stirred into motion, awakened by her song. He saw now that these were no statues, but giants of the grandest and most ancient kind. Frost giants who had walked the frozen wastes and who were already ancient when the first man came screaming into the world.

His legs held as surely as if they were shackled in iron, and unless he could outmaneuver them, he knew he stood no chance against the waking giants. Already they moved toward him across the vast chamber, limbs slowed by centuries of slowly fading sleep and each wielding a colossal blade made of the same steely frost that formed the walls of the place. Once more Cat-eye tried to move, to turn and flee from the ancient citadel but though he struggled and even chipped at the frost with his blade, he simply could not break loose from his icy prison.

The ice-witch laughed, a cruel cackle as cold as any storm, and the giants were almost upon him. The ground quaked beneath their massive boots as they went. Holding the blade before him, Cat-eye prepared to make a stand; perhaps the warrior gods of these northern climes would smile upon him, or at least make a place for him among the honored dead. As the first giant neared him, he steadied himself, praying to Rhia, goddess of luck, that he might live.

The huge creature came near at him and raised its massive blade above its head, ready to strike a killing blow. But Cat-eye swung out, as far as he could with the massive blade, and sliced the thing's hamstring. Bluish blood sprayed from the wound, but Cat-eye's blade rebounded with such force that it flew from his hand, clattering to the icy chamber floor. Cursing, he tried to reach for his blade, as the injured giant stumbled backward, slowing the already sluggish progress of its fellow.

Unable to reach the blade Cat-eye began to reach for his daggers - though they would be of little value against foes so large as these, he was not about to die without a fight - but then, he was assailed by a vision, which came unbidden to his mind.

He saw Catryn's lovely face, so warm and earthly illumined by the flames of the fire back in the Raven's Roost, and he remembered the gift she had given him. From a pouch at his belt, he withdrew the silver flask, thinking to drink from it a taste of courage before death gripped him with its icy fist, but when he found it strangely warm to the touch, another, wilder idea took him.

The injured giant loped toward him again, and its fellow was now moving faster close behind. In heartbeats they would be upon him, but Cat-eye did not hesitate. Half mad with urgency, he poured the contents of the flask onto the ice-shackles. At first he thought he had indeed acted foolishly, but then, as the warm vision of Catryn came to him once more, the ice began to melt as if it had been no more than ordinary snow that had warmed for hours in the sun. Cat-eye did not waste a moment, he pulled himself free of the ice; the last remnants of it cracked noisily, and the sound mixed strangely with the ice-witch's rising screams.

Cat-eye snatched his great sword from the floor nearby and fled from the citadel. He might be able to stand against the giants were he fresh and well prepared, but now he noticed fully how cold he was. His only chance was to outrun the lumbering things. He could only hope that the centuries of sleep would continue to slow their steps.

In spite of the chill that slowed his limbs and bit his flesh, he ran, out of the citadel, across the fields of snow. It seemed to him as if he ran for hours; he seemed to have come much farther than he remembered, and snow now fell in great flurries from the stone-grey clouds above, slowing him.

At last, he came to his horse, its dark mane almost covered beneath a layer of freshly fallen snow. He brushed it tenderly, glad for the warmth of another living being of warm blood and flesh. He mounted and looked back toward the strange spires, but saw no sign of it, and if the giants followed, he saw no sign of them either.

Shivering with the cold, he spoke to his steed, "I suppose we shall seek our fortune elsewhere, I have had enough of giants for this day, and I owe a certain serving girl thanks for my very life!"

He glanced once more toward where the spires had been, perplexed that no trace of the massive citadel remained. For a moment, he wondered if the whole thing had been some strange dream or hallucination. It seemed as if he had no memento of the event but the cold that stung his flesh and numbed his limbs. But then he looked at the naked blade of his great sword. Azure blood stained its edge, frozen solid in the frigid air.

Hook, Line & Sinker

by Wolt

“Hook Line and Sinker” format (paraphrased) is a sure-fire way to plan out an adventure for PCs by preparing the different elements into an adventure format that closely follows Freytag’s Pyramid. Where Freytag’s Pyramid is closely related to campaign structure, HLS is closer to adventure formatting. A brief explanation of HLS will be provided, followed by some great starter examples for you to use; ideally though, you will come to understand the process and learn to create your own hook, line and sinkers with ease.

Please note: I did not pioneer or even develop the HLS format, it is described here for the benefit of the reader.

The Hook

“Have a goal. Once the Hook (also read: plot-hook) is set there are now conditions for victory and failure that should be at least in part understood by the PCs.”

Create a hook by understanding the basic motivations of PCs: Greed, Revenge, Glory, Heroism and Knowledge. Well developed PCs will have extensive backgrounds you can exploit for motivations.

The Line

“Tie the encounters together and progress the plot with each meaningful encounter. Encounters need not be only monsters or traps. They can be literally anything that has a meaningful effect on the plot.”

What is the motivating hook the players are after that should be the focus point of the end game? Consider what the players need in order to obtain the goal. The “line” is a direct reference to fishing, reeling in the PCs in towards the goal/climax like one might reel in a fish.

The Sinker

“Crown the adventure with a great encounter or interesting twist that will serve as the exit strategy and also lead into your next adventure hook.”

When it comes to design, every adventure and campaign needs its own unique, climactic encounter. Classically, there are several elements to consider:

*Stakes

The climactic encounter should have the highest stakes of the entire adventure. Some stakes include the lives of the PCs or ownership of a McGuffin. Regardless of what the stakes are, now is the time to unveil the masterstroke and bring out all of the hidden elements...

*Tension

Tension is a difficult thing to generate, but by raising the stakes, you’re halfway there. Next, make losing a real possibility, or even a probable outcome. That said, don’t make it impossible. If the heroes can’t win, it kills tension just as much as if they’re sure to win, and in no case should you ever make the encounter impossible except for your hidden *deus ex machina* which will come into play only when the PCs are sure to lose... This means the characters didn’t affect any real change and are no longer the focus of the story.

*Setting

If the climax is a combat encounter, it should have the most interesting terrain features. If it is a social encounter, public locations are best, especially if they have a lot of people involved. These types of locations make it interesting on a fundamental level. A combat with a dragon is interesting; a combat with a dragon on a stone bridge over a lake of lava with minions charging, the lava flowing from both sides with the McGuffin resting on a pedestal on the far side is climactic (even if a bit cliché).

*The Unexpected

The last thing a climax needs is a shift. The climax is where hidden allies throw their hand in with the heroes, where traitors turn on their ‘friends’, where hidden plots come out, enemy reinforcements arrive and all heck breaks loose.

Examples:

The following examples can be used for any system and virtually any setting. What is more important is that the genre line up appropriately. Fill them in like you would Mad-Libs exercises. They are set up in the “fill in the blanks” fashion to help you adapt them to your game world that is either new or already in progress. While these may seem a bit cliché to some readers, remember it is not the story you tell, but how you tell it that

determines if it is well received by the audience.

Fantasy HLS: They Captured the Princess!

Hook: The town of (insert name of town) is a small location on the outskirts of (insert name of geographical region) populated mostly by (insert fantasy race of choice). They are currently beset upon by a (insert organization, such as infestation, horde, cult, etc.) of (insert monster of choice). The townsfolk have posted a public reward of (insert power level appropriate reward of choice). Rumors around town say that things have gotten complicated recently though, because it appears the king's daughter (or equivalent) has gotten mixed up in things; though the details aren't clear, they are just rumors after all.

Line: The players will find out through some local (choose organization type: police, militia, soldiers, royal guards) that the (insert enemy race chosen above) problem is something the current protective forces have had their numbers dwindled by significantly in recent times... many a good defender was lost fighting to protect their homeland in recent days. As such they are not capable of a full on assault and recommend the PCs take a more stealthy approach if they are going after the (enemy chosen above). Specifically, taking down the leader is recommended as it will demoralize the enemy and raise spirits locally for the citizens who have lost loved ones in recent times because of the attacks. It is also revealed that the princess was captured for (political, personal, revenge, ransom) reasons. Her carriage was raided while passing near enemy territory.

The PCs will learn the enemy is located in (insert unique remote location of choice, difficult to access) which is well defended and fortified and will certainly provide a unique tactical challenge. On the way to the remote location the PCs will encounter traps of various sorts, a raiding party set to ambush, some adverse weather conditions and a (insert large regional predator of choice) that is rather hungry. This area is especially known for the previous occupants being the ancient civilization of (insert ancient civilization of choice) and there are several ruins to explore nearby, but all with an element of danger as ancient traps may exist, grave robbers may be present and of course, wandering bands of (the enemy chosen above).

Sinker: The PCs arrive at the location of the enemy fort, possibly after pillaging some ancient treasure from the ruins on the way. Once there, they will notice the enemy location is heavily fortified and a frontal assault will not be a good option. The PCs will have to choose either a diplomatic or stealth route to the leader and

will have to be careful not to alert guards along the way. The sudden appearance of sounds of battle or dead bodies is sure to put the encampment on edge. Be sure to demonstrate any cultural behaviors of the chosen enemy while they perform reconnaissance. Doing so may help them understand the motives of the captors and may prove useful later. Retrieving the princess will not be easy however, she will be well guarded in a public location. The PCs will have to use special trickery and tactics to free her (based upon your layout of the location and choice of enemy). It is also possible that if the PCs bumble the mission terribly by alerting the entire enemy organization, the princess may be executed in spite of their efforts. The PCs should make it a point to investigate the motivations of the enemy which could be very simplistic, but will probably be more interesting if there is an inherent plot twist of sorts that causes the PCs to think about their actions.

Resolution: If the PCs kill the enemy leader, rout the enemy forces and rescue the princess they should be given a substantial reward and a small amount of local fame. Anything less should decrease the reward substantially, total failure should leave them in dishonor. Regardless of the resolution, the king's emissaries will contact the PCs with a special errand that will lead them to their next adventure. If the PCs managed the best resolution, the adventure should be of a heroic or epic nature, if the PCs bumbled every aspect of the mission it may be a death sentence from the king in disguise designed to rid the country of them.

Supers HLS: We've got a 10-30 in progress!

Hook: The heroes are out on patrol when they discover (either through police scanner, seeing the police cars flip on their sirens and lights and turn around abruptly, or some other means provided through their powers) that there is a bank robbery in progress downtown. The leader of the bank robbers may even be the nemesis of one of the heroes.

Line: The PCs will find the police have the building surrounded, but that the robbers inside (at least one of which should also have super powers and be uniquely designed to confront the PCs) have taken hostages. The police are nervous because they haven't killed anyone yet, but have shot a bank teller as an example that they mean business ... negotiations have failed and the police are hesitant to cut the power and rush in with guns blazing because there are innocents inside, but will cooperate with the heroes so much as they are able (this may be complicated if the PCs are vigilantes or viewed badly by the public or police force).

They know that the enemy has at least a dozen men

inside all armed with automatic weapons and they are currently cutting through the safe... fortunately this takes a long time because banks in this city have learned to doubly reinforce their vaults and put in high security defenses due to the threat of super villains.

Once inside the PCs will have to take down several mooks, and possibly even a whole team of supers depending on what level of challenge is appropriate to the party. Be sure to make all supers unique and individualized with appropriate characterization.

Sinker: The PCs can find out through interrogating the supers in the bank that the bank was never the actual target, that this whole thing was just a diversion to draw out the police en masse and that there is a bomb in a subway car headed this way, the resulting explosion will decimate the police force, including the special anti-super villain task force on premises. Once they are out of the way, the villains will have the money in the bank and carve out a reputation as powerful cop killers and it will set the stage for their leader who will be unleashing a wave of (your choice of antagonist, robots, alien parasites, the villains in the maximum security prison, etc.) upon the city to rain down destruction on the current order so he may take over the city.

Resolution: The PCs actually have to do investigation and/or interrogation to discover the hidden plot of the subway bomb, and then they have to find a way to stop it, which should not be easy as the subway is already in motion and the bomb is rigged to blow without a shut-off switch. If the bomb blows at all the heroes will have not completed the mission satisfactorily, even if they divert the explosion and save the police force and civilians on the subway, this will cause massive property damage, at least collapsing a subway tunnel in use.

The end boss villain that will unleash the attack on the city should never be physically present during this adventure, possibly his voice might be heard on a radio or his silhouette visible on a screen, but all of his communications will be encrypted and very difficult to trace. The mastermind will be delayed if the heroes are successful, but far from stopped. He has other super villains in his employ as well as other resources at his disposal.

In the aftermath if the PCs fail to stop the bank robbery the same villains from the heist can be reused. If they succeed, new villains will have to be used next time, but this time they will be used to draw out the PCs in an attempt to capture and kill them for disrupting the plans of the mastermind. The mastermind should not be present for at least 2 full adventures before he makes his first appearance to the PCs.

Sci-Fi HLS: • • • — — — • • • (S.O.S.)

Hook: While in deep space the PCs receive an SOS signal from a ship that is actually en route ... the communication says nothing about the situation.

The Line: The PCs will have to head to the ship which appears to be free floating and have no thruster capabilities, further, life support systems are beginning to fail on several decks.

Once close proximity is established, a low powered radio signal will be found. There is a group trapped inside in a small barricaded room towards the center of the ship. They are being held hostage by... SPACE ZOMBIES (or other appropriate antagonist of choice). There was an outbreak that caused the crew to change... it had something to do with sabotage and the fact that the precious cargo on the ship is a much needed cure for a pox on planet (insert name). They suspect the (insert choice antagonist organization) of having sabotaged the ship because they don't want the cure to arrive at the planet as keeping the planet population of (unusual alien race) suppressed with the pox allows them to maintain control over it for (insert choice motivation: it's a good place for a space station, it has rare minerals, the people have special powers and must be kept weak so as not to rise up, etc.). It's not just about the scientists trapped in the room, but the fate of an entire planetary civilization. The (chosen antagonist organization) are said to already have the cure, but this is the first time someone else has discovered it and the only hope for the people.

Sinker: The PCs will need to board the ship to rescue the crew in time and fight through space zombies (or other antagonist of choice) to get to the scientists and the cure. Leaving the scientists to die means the cure will be destroyed by the zombies (or other). While fighting through the ship, hull breaches may occur, and life support may fail, several times even. It is best to blow the ship to prevent the infestation from spreading... further, let us hope none of the PCs, scientists or the crew of the PCs got infected... (dun dun dunnn!)

Resolution: Now what to do with the scientists and the cure? Sell it for a fortune and toss the scientists out an air lock? Deliver it to the planet that is occupied by (chosen antagonist organization) and become their enemies? Some other option? The possibilities could even ignite a space war! The PCs will have to tread carefully when dealing with the outcome of this. Regardless of what happens, the resolution should be large, but remember space is big, so be sure the PCs can fade into obscurity if needed or desired and that something else is also going on across the galaxy that might pique their interest.

The Titan's Hammer

by Sean Samonus

It was cold. That was the main problem. Too cold and night was setting fast. As Mantarok looked across the snowy field, he was barely able to see the tree line because of the swirling wind and flurries of snow. He and his friends had come north in search of the Titan's Hammer, a supposedly giant hammer of great magical power. From what he knew of it, the Frost Giants of the Frozen Wastes held it in their stronghold. In the warm southern lands, it was all fun and adventure to think about going and getting it. Once they found themselves here however...He looked back at Saerah and Allen, Allen leading their horse and Saerah wrapped in warm furs sitting on its back. Looking back, all he could think was, 'I should never have listened to that damn dwarf.'

"I'm telling you it's real!" Tanlinn shouted at the gnome sitting across from him. Gimble, the gnome, simply shook his head and said, "It is a geological impossibility. No hammer of that size would ever be forged. It's impossible to exist." The dwarf took a drink from his tankard of ale and shook his head, a small spray of ale sitting on his beard below his lower lip. "And I say what does a gnome know of forging hammers? The ancient human magi, they could have done countless different things with their magic!"

Gimble rolled his eyes, knowing that once Tanlinn started talking crazy about the "ancient human magi" that it would be a while before he could talk rationally again. Gimble generally weathered such conversations with good nature, but before he could say anything a human approached their table. He was young and very tall, wearing nice clothing and had a holy symbol to Mithrious pinned to his shirt. His blonde hair fell loose about his shoulders and he grinned as he said, "I heard you talking about the Titan's Hammer, correct?"

Tanlinn looked up at the human and raised an eyebrow. He was slow to respond, sitting and thinking about the man's holy symbol. An open worshiper of Mithrious, even in the Akari coasts, was a dangerous man to associate with. After Emperor Broodan had outlawed the practice, most clerics and believers had either converted to that abominable new religion, The Church of Maltier, or gone into hiding. Finally, he gave a wary, "Aye, that we are."

The young man smiled broadly and said, "Well, my friends and I have actually been looking for that very artifact. I don't suppose you've any knowledge of where it might be?" Tanlinn let out a laugh and Gimble rolled his eyes. The two had been talking about it, before beginning to argue over its existence. Tanlinn said, "Oh, we know where it is. See my gnome friend and I have a contest where he finds the location of artifacts and I have to go track it down. If I return alive and with the item, I win. If I die or return empty-handed, he wins." Tanlinn added with a chuckle, "I'd like to point out that I've yet to lose."

The young man extended a hand and said, "Well, it sounds like you are just the two gentlemen I would like to speak to. My name is Mantarok Kandrick, and it's a pleasure to meet you." The dwarf shook his hand and Gimble simply placed a scroll into his hand when Mantarok opened it towards the gnome. Gimble shook his head, a loose strand of brown hair falling down across his face as he said, "It's like I was telling Tanlinn, it can't exist. It must simply be an exaggeration or a falsehood. No hammer could be that size!" Tanlinn simply snorted and muttered something into his mug about gnomes and forging.

Mantarok looked at the map and said, "Well, if you know where it is, why isn't Tanlinn setting out?" Tanlinn coughed and spluttered in his upturned mug and snatched the map out of Mantarok's hands. Pointing at a mountain range and he said, "Because it lies in the lair of a particularly brutal Ice Troll. None who attempt to kill him survive."

Tanlinn folded the map and handed it back, saying, "It would be suicide to try to pilfer from a Ice Troll. I would be dead before I could even get to the hammer..." he looked to Gimble, who was about to interject and said quickly, "Which does exist!" Mantarok grinned and said, "Well, how much would you be interested in selling it for?" Gimble looked to Tanlinn, then at the young man sitting there. He piped up, "You are joking, right? No one could get in and out of that place alive. You'd just end up in his Ice Troll stewpot."

Mantarok placed a large pouch that clinked as it hit the table as he grabbed the map and said, "Well, I'll be sure to stop by and let you know how it went then. Though I imagine once I have the hammer, you'll be hearing about me well before you see me." With a laugh, he headed back over to a table where a beautiful half-elven woman was sitting with another man whose features were hidden by his upturned hood and a scarf wrapped across his lower face. Tanlinn and Gimble both shrugged and went back to their drinks.

After a bit, the woman let out an excited laugh and all three got up and left the tavern. Gimble reached into his bag and pulled out another map. "This one, I think you'll find interesting. It's an ancient city from the Age of Magi. Supposed to be one of the last surviving cities left from that time period."

Mantarok shook some more snow from the furs he had wrapped himself in and let out a sigh. His breath billowed before him as he gestured to the others towards the tree line. Once they were close enough he yelled over the storm, "We have to get to shelter until this storm is over! Saerah, can you do something about the cold?" Saerah nodded, though Mantarok recognized a slight bit of worry in her eyes. They had thought they had prepared adequately for the trip, but it seems they hadn't counted on the temperature and weather being as harsh as it was.

Saerah, however, was no coward. She was one of the most adept magic-users of their time and she was willing to coerce the arcane to bend to her will, if need be. Allen, however, was not too worried. He had survived harsher conditions, though never any as cold as this. Luckily, he knew about surviving in the wild, so if Saerah's magic failed them, he would be able to construct a hasty shelter. Mantarok was born and raised in cities, his talents were not in the outdoors.

They continued and finally found themselves under the slight protection of the trees. Allen set Mantarok to gathering wood, but dry wood was not readily found under their current conditions. Luckily, Saerah was able to dry the wood out using a spell she had learned during her apprenticeship. Swiftly, Allen set about making a small fire, but was unable to get a spark to catch, try as he might with his flint and tinder. Eventually, he gave up in anger and disgust and threw the flint down. Saerah stepped up and whispered gently to the

wood and suddenly a small fire bloomed forth. Allen glared at her, then picked up his flint and said, "Well, if you could do that from the beginning, why make me bother?"

She smiled sweetly and said, "It's more fun to watch you struggle. Besides, didn't want to step on your rugged, outdoorsman ego." Allen grumbled and began to set up the tent. Mantarok rifled through the pack and pulled out some trail rations they had picked up at the last town they had been in. Apparently it was some sort of smoked walrus jerky. It wasn't bad, though it definitely had a unique flavoring to it. Saerah bit into it delicately and frowned. She was not a fan. Mantarok handed a piece to Allen, who had finished erecting the

tent around the fire. Allen removed his scarf and slowly chewed on the piece of jerky. Of the three of them, Allen seemed to enjoy the taste the most. Mantarok simply ate his with his usual enthusiasm and they all gathered together in the tent.

Three sleeping bags were laid out on the floor and each of them sat down upon one. They chatted quietly amongst themselves but eventually the conversation turned to the topic of the Titan's Hammer. Mantarok pulled out an old weather beaten tome and opened to a page with a picture of an

ornately decorated hammer. It had a massive handle, inlaid with all manner of gems and precious jewels. But as large as the handle was, the head of the hammer was even larger. In the middle was a stylized fist, and it looked like it was holding the head of the hammer. Each end of the head had several thick spikes set into it. It was said that if one could wield the massive artifact, they would wield immense power.

As morning dawned the next day, Mantarok stepped out to greet the rising sun. It seemed the storm passed in the night and in the clear dawn he saw they were



much closer than he had thought. As he knelt and prayed to Mithrious, basking in the warm glow of her loving rays, Allen stepped out of the tent. Crouching next to Mantarok, he said, "Saerah is still sleeping. Breakfast?" Mantarok nodded and rose with his friend. Pointing to the nearby mountains, he said, "I think we are really close to the Ice Troll's lair. Do you want to do some scouting and we can wait here for you?"

Allen nodded. Though he had an idea that while scouting ahead was certainly a good idea, Mantarok likely just wanted some time alone with Saerah. The two got along well enough, but it always seemed like there was some undercurrent of tension between the two. Allen had a feeling it was likely to blossom into love, but for now they tended to argue more than anything else. But they were young kids and emotions at that age are difficult. Allen wistfully thought back to meeting and wooing his own wife. He smiled at the thought, though it quickly turned sour as it brought up unwanted pangs of hurt at the thought that his beautiful Marianne was no longer with him. Regardless, it wasn't any of his business to be letting his mind wander when there was tracking and scouting to be done. He set out to explore the terrain.

Mantarok went back into the tent after Allen left and looked at the sleeping form of Saerah. He smiled and thought to himself how extraordinary she was. The youngest wizard to have attained her level of ability, she had been training from an early age to be the best at it. That is, until Broodan had won the war and set into place several laws forbidding any of the Academies to train any students who weren't human. Saerah's teachers had snuck her away under cover of darkness and with Mantarok's aid before any harm could befall her. She had been holding up remarkably well considering her academic training had ended so abruptly and early. Saerah took a pragmatic view of it though, always saying that "her schooling may have ended, but it was simply because she was so good they needed her to go to her practical training immediately."

She stirred and began to wake. Mantarok stepped outside and rubbed his hands together. Eventually, she stepped out of the tent. She was wrapped in her winter furs and holding her spell-book as she studied the pages. Looking up briefly, she saw Mantarok looking over their baggage and she smiled. He was very handsome and very brave, to be sure. 'It's a pity he isn't as smart as me,' she thought as she went back to her studying. It was sometimes frustrating for her to try to have conversations with him and he couldn't keep up with her pace.

Still...he was pleasant enough to have around and she certainly did like him. She just wasn't sure if she liked

him well enough to invite the absurdity of romance into her mind. She disdained romance and had tried to avoid it through most of her life. Many of her fellow students, male and female, had expressed interest in her but she had rebuffed all of her would-be suitors. Romance simply distracted from study and reading, her only true loves. But ever since she had met the handsome and quick-witted paladin, she had been finding herself sadly distracted. It was only through her immensely well developed iron will that she refused to allow him into her heart.

Once finished with her studying, Saerah looked over at Mantarok and said, "By the way, where is Allen? I miss his cheerful demeanor and optimism." Mantarok chuckled and said, "He is just looking out for us 'kids'. I've known him for many years and he's never forgotten that we met by him saving my life. I sent him out scouting, we are much closer than I thought last night and I don't want to approach this cave with no warning or come across an Ice Troll by surprise." Saerah nodded in agreement. She wasn't willing to admit it to herself, but she was very nervous about facing a full-grown Ice Troll.

Allen returned about midday, and said, "I found the cave. It's not too far from here, which is a frightening thought. I think we are well-within its hunting range. We have to be careful, because I'm sure it will be more than happy to have us for dinner." Saerah nervously swallowed and said, "Well, I suppose I should be glad then that I studied up on my fire spells for today. I did some research and from what I hear Trolls are remarkably sturdy creatures. It will heal itself and regenerate any wounds unless you burn them with fire."

The two men nodded and Mantarok loosened his sword in its scabbard. Allen as well strung his bow and strapped a fresh quiver of arrows to his back. Saerah looked at him and said, "Here, I have an idea. Let me see your arrows." Allen acquiesced and she spoke a few words of magic while gesturing over the arrows and pinching a small piece of sulfur over the quiver. She handed it back and said, "Now they should burst into flames after your shoot them. Will definitely be helpful." Allen nodded and strapped the quiver on his back again.

Allen stepped forward and said, "I'll lead you to the cave. Once there, I think we should see if it is home or not. Hopefully it may be out raiding and we can go explore its cave." The other two nodded and followed his lead as he moved deeper into the forest. After several hours of marching, they found themselves at the entrance to a small cave. The entrance was littered with the bones of vaguely human looking skeletons, as well as the carcasses of rotting beasts and animals.

Saerah wrinkled her nose in disgust as Mantarok retched quietly behind her. Allen motioned for them to wait there and whispered, "I'm going to investigate the cave. If it is in there, I'll attempt to sneak out. I'd be prepared though...just in case."

With that, he began to sneak into the dark cave mouth. The smell of rotting meat and unwashed flesh was staggering. As he moved deeper into the cave, the dark started to become too deep for him to see through. Luckily, right before the light ran out, he saw the slumbering bulk of the Ice Troll. It was a massive creature, stretched out at least ten feet in length. It had on a crude loin cloth of what looked to be human flesh and had a polar bear hide as a blanket with the head of the bear resting upon its own head. Allen paused, unsure of what to do. They would have to draw the creature out to claim the treasure that lay deeper in its lair, but he was unsure as to what the best method for that would be.

As he stood there thinking, his ears twitched as he caught the sound of snuffling. The Troll's eyes were opening and its nose was flexing as it sniffed the air. Allen started to creep out as he heard the thunderous crash of the creature standing up and moving about the cave. It rumbled a growl and spoke something in a language that Allen didn't understand. The intention was clear enough though, as the Troll started moving quickly towards the entrance of the cave. Allen forwent all attempts at stealth at this point and broke into a run, yelling out to Mantarok and Saerah, "Troll! It's here! Troll!"

As soon as Allen ran, the Troll's head whipped about and let out a bellowing roar amidst a spray of spittle. It reached over and grabbed a uprooted tree that it used as a club and charged towards the puny human attempting to flee. It let out an almost malicious laugh as it slammed the make-shift club towards Allen. Allen luckily dived out of the way of the club and it crashed into the ground he had been standing on only moments before. The troll gave a disgruntled growl and lifted the club again to smash the human. Allen rolled to his feet and started running again, only to be swatted at again and again. Allen, however, was light on his feet and good at dodging such ponderous and slow attacks.

As he burst out of the cave, he saw Mantarok standing off to the left and Saerah hiding behind a low ridge. Immediately, the troll burst out of the cave and made a grab for Allen. As it did, Saerah finished her incantation and pointed at the troll. The troll let out a pained roar as its flesh burst into fire and blackened. It swatted at its body, attempting to put out the flames that were consuming it. Allen quickly pivoted and launched two arrows at the Troll, which burst into flame and lodged

themselves in its arm. Mantarok quickly leapt off the rock he had been standing on and drove his sword into the neck of the burning troll.

It roared in pain and anger and grabbed onto Mantarok. Wrenching the sword out of the man's hand, The Troll threw him off and away from itself. Mantarok landed with a loud crunching sound against a tree trunk and lay still. Allen grimaced and launched two more arrows as he tried to stay out of the way of the Troll's grasping hands. Saerah let out a scream at the sight of Mantarok getting tossed like a rag doll and stood up out of her hiding spot. The Troll's head immediately turned to this new movement and let out a crude laugh. It recognized a magic-user when it saw one and knew they were easy to kill and eat. Ignoring the peppering of arrows and attempts of Allen to get its attention, it moved towards the young half-elf.

Saerah began speaking in strange words and her hands suddenly burst into flames. As she continued to recite her spell, a strange symbol began to form on the ground before her. Suddenly, the symbol collapsed in on itself and revealed a fiery portal. Out of it, a gigantic serpentine creature made entirely out of fire burst forth and bellowed a challenge to the Ice Troll. The Troll's eyes widened in fear as it attempted to stop its charging momentum. Allen let out a gasp at the sheer power of the elemental that Saerah had summoned forth. The being was composed entirely of fire, birthed from the very plane of flame and heat. Its very touch withered and charred the flesh of the Ice Troll. Soon, the Troll let out a strangled cry of agony as it burst into flames and collapsed, slowly burning till nothing but the skeleton was left.

The Elemental then turned towards Saerah. She wavered slightly on her feet, but she maintained control. But clearly her strength was fading and Allen could see that the Elemental knew that. It longed to consume her as well and only needed her to falter once for it to destroy her. Allen shouted out, "Send it back!" but she shook her head and cried out, "I don't know how...I've never summoned anything like this before without a controlled environment."

Allen raced over to her as the creature of fire loomed over her, testing her will and finding the chinks in her mental armor. It was like an inferno when he reached her side, how she could stand the heat Allen was not sure. "You have to send it back! It will kill us all if you don't!" Saerah glared at him and shouted, "I know that! You think I don't know that? I don't really know how I summoned it in the first place!" Allen rolled his eyes and looked around. Maybe if he could somehow get it to go back onto the portal it might be sent back. It

seemed to be avoiding it as it moved closer to Saerah. Allen looked at the distance and let out a breath.

“Okay, I’ll see what I can do.” he said as he ran up to the giant fire snake. It looked at him and hissed something in the language of the elements. Allen simply waved at it and yelled loudly as he danced around. It let out another hiss and slithered closer to him. Allen kept backing away towards the portal, hoping the creature wouldn’t see what he was attempting to do. Suddenly, he felt the ground give way beneath his heels and he knew he had reached the edge of the portal. The fire snake reared up for a lunge and Allen dived out of the way at the last second. The lunge propelled the elemental into the portal, where Saerah let out a final yell and it snapped shut.

The danger gone, the strain and toll of the magical energies she had summoned forth threatened to bring her to her knees, but Saerah refused to collapse. Weary as she was, she moved towards Mantarok’s still form, quiet tears falling down her cheeks and freezing from the cold. She knelt beside him and felt his face. It was so cold and it didn’t seem like he was breathing. Blood seemed to ooze from a wound in his side, likely a spot his armor had bent in and hurt him from the crash. She touched his cheek and whispered, “Please don’t die, Mantarok. I...I...” she let out a cry of surprise as his eyes fluttered and he let out a groan of pain.

“You what?” he said, his voice heavy with pain. He managed a smile and said, “I’m not too hurt...” he winced as he attempted to sit up and was unable to do so. Saerah let out a laugh and called Allen over to help her get his armour off. Once it was, she saw that indeed the armour had buckled in and cut his side. The wound wasn’t too grievous though and they were able to dress it adequately enough with some bandages and healing herbs that Allen had gathered. Once standing, he gestured to the cave and said, “Well, that wasn’t too hard, was it? Looks like our treasure awaits inside.” and started towards the cave entrance.

Allen and Saerah grinned and followed after him. They lit a torch and moved past the sleeping area of the monster. Saerah made a mental note to check it for anything of value that the Troll’s previous meals may have left behind. Moving past it, there was a large tunnel that led deep underground. It felt like they had been marching for hours, and the whole time the temperature inside the tunnel seemed to be increasing with each step. Finally, they saw a light glimmering in the distance and Saerah pointed out that the tunnel seemed to be changing from a rough-hewn rock to worked stone.

massive torches. It looked like there had been several other entrances to this room at one point, but they all were collapsed and full of rubble. But sitting in the center of the room was a massive altar. All along the walls were ornate friezes, depicting giant human looking creatures smithing and forging a massive hammer. Statues of perfect looking men of gigantic proportion stared silently down on them as they struggled to move up the stairs that led to the altar.

Finally they reached the top of the stairs. The altar looked to be made out of pure obsidian, carved somehow to depict a raging battlefield. And perched atop it, sitting in a golden stand was the Titan’s Hammer. Saerah let out a giggle of excitement as Mantarok clapped Allen on the back. “We found it, my friends. We found the Titan’s Hammer.” The hammer looked exactly like the picture that Mantarok had been carrying. It was massive in scale and they could hardly believe that anything could have ever been large enough to wield such an item.

Staring in awe and reverence, they were startled when a booming voice called out, “Those who would seek to use the Titan’s Hammer, beware! For those that created it were cursed for failing to remember this simple law. Power is meant to protect, never to harm. Those who would dare to use the Hammer of the Titan’s must remember that its strength is not in destruction, but in protecting others.”

With that, the altar sank into the ground, leaving the Hammer even with the floor. Mantarok stepped forward and took hold of the handle as he called out, “I swear upon Mithrious that I will only use this Hammer to defend and protect!” With that, the hammer quickly began shrinking down in size until it was the appropriate size for Mantarok to wield comfortably. The voice boomed out again, “Then go forth, young paladin. You have a fate none will envy, but if you keep to your oath, it may work out in the end for good.”

With that, a low rumbling began. Soon, the entire room was shaking and pieces of rubble began to fall from the ceiling. The trio of friends quickly ran back to the tunnel, dodging large rocks and pieces of stone as they made their way across the room. Once in the tunnel, they stopped as the last of the rubble fell and tumbled down, leaving the room blocked off forever. Saerah let out a sigh and finally said, “That is amazing, Mantarok. I can’t believe you were able to get it! I can’t wait to see the look on that gnome’s face when we bring this back!” Allen and Mantarok grinned and nodded. As they made their way out of the cave, Mantarok linked arms with his friends and smiled.

Eventually, it opened up to a large room that was lit by

The Book of DOOM

by Sourcebook Staff and jj_wolven

Fiery Handprint

Enchantment [Fire]
Hexblade 3, Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S
Casting time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Target: Touched object
Duration: 3 rounds
Saving throw: None; see text
Spell resistance: Yes

This spell places a burning hand print on the targeted creature that deals 1d6 fire damage for two rounds. When this spell's duration ends, it causes an explosion with a radius of 10 ft, centered on the target, that deals 1d6 fire damage per caster level (max 10d6) to all creatures in the area of effect. The initial target does not get a save against this damage, but the rest of the creatures in the area can attempt a Reflex save for half damage.

by mrrodgers

Flash Shield

Abjuration [Force]
Level: Sor/Wiz 2
Components: V, S
Casting time: 1 immediate action
Range: personal
Duration: Concentration (up to 1 round/level) or until dismissed
Saving Throw: None
SR: None

You shout a quick stream of words and make a quick gesture, and a shield of invisible force springs up around you and absorbs the imminent attacks of different types depending on the version chosen (see below). Maintaining this spell beyond one attack is difficult, however, and requires a DC 15 Concentration check to maintain for the rest of the round and takes a move action. The spell effect can be maintained by a Concentration check as a move action, but the DC increases by 5 every round. If you are damaged, you still need to make a separate check to maintain the spell per the Concentration skill.

Flash Shield: Physical

You gain a bonus to AC of +1 per caster level

Flash Shield: Magic

You gain an SR of 10 +1/level

Flash Shield: Damage

You gain DR +1/- per 2 levels (this does not stack with any other sources of DR)

Flash Shield: Energy

You gain Energy Resistance +1 per level for any one chosen element (acid, cold, electricity, fire, sonic)

by Maxxrox

Phantasma

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]
Lvl: Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Short
Target: one creature
Duration: 1 round / lvl
Saving Throw: Will partial (see text)
Spell Resistance: Yes

The wizard crushed the bone in his hand, finishing the spell and smirked. Suddenly, one of the opposing warriors flew into a maddened rage, screaming about "the darkness". He killed all of his companions, and then himself. The wizard stood there and smirked.

This spell makes the target think that their worst nightmares have come to life around them. They have no control over their actions, instead attacking the nearest target or themselves (if no person is reachable in one move action). They are entitled to a Will save every round. If successful, the spell ends, but the target is still shaken for an hour.

Special:

The more powerful the demon bone used, the more potent the spell. For every 5 HD of the demon for the bone used, add 1 to the DC of the spell (rounded down).

+1 DC/5 HD of demon

Material Component: The bone of a demon rubbed with 25gp of powdered black opal.

by Maxxrox

Reality Snap

Transmutation
Caster Level: Sor/Wiz 3
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 swift action
Range: Close (25 ft + 5 ft/ 2 levels)
Target: You

Duration: 1 standard action

Your outline becomes fuzzy, and then suddenly the universe groans as reality snaps, allowing you to be in two places at once. You create two small rifts in reality within range that causes you to manifest in both locations simultaneously and seems like you are two places at once. If either takes damage, the damage is dealt to you when the spell's duration ends. Both you must perform the same action, and each does half the amount of damage they normally would with either physical or spell attack.

Both you have a +5 dodge bonus to AC that stacks with other dodge bonuses on account of not being there half the time. This bonus only applies to actions during that standard action.

by Maxxrox

Greater Reality Snap

Transmutation

Caster Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 swift action

Range: Close (25 ft + 5 ft/ 2 levels)

Target: You

The "Book of DOOM: Dnd Onlinegames Official Manual" is the official sourcebook of dndonlinegames.com, created through the DND OG Sourcebook Project. The Book of DOOM contains optional materials that have been submitted by the gamers at DND OG, discussed/balanced by gamers at DND OG, and voted on by the DND OG Sourcebook Staff, also consisting of gamers at DND OG. We'd like to thank everyone who contributes to our Sourcebook, recognized at the end of each of their submissions, as well as the current Sourcebook Staff (jj_wolven, Makenshi, TheChuck, aerondor).

If you would like to contribute to the DND OG Sourcebook Project, you can submit your custom options in the [Public Submissions Vol. II](#) thread.



Duration: 1 standard action

Your outline becomes fuzzy, and then suddenly the universe groans as reality snaps, allowing you to be in two places at once. The snapped ends of reality allows a 'version' of you to appear on both ends, allowing each to make an independent standard action before merging again and only allowing one version. Both have a +5 bonus to AC on account of reality not completely accepting either while separated. This bonus only applies to actions during that standard action.

by Maxxrox

Holiday in Costa Rica

A D20 Modern Adventure
An Adventure by A.C. Gogolski

This adventures uses the D20 Modern rules system.

Ah... Costa Rica. Beautiful waterfalls, pristine jungles, rumbling volcanoes. So much to see... if only it would stop raining. Despite the rain, your tour guide invites you on a secret excursion to a remote volcano. Little do you know that an ancient menace lurks in one of the forgotten pools surrounding Barva Volcano. Can you escape before it's too late?

Suggested party: 3-5 characters, levels 2-4. DMs may modify encounter challenges appropriate to the experience levels of their group.

Rules system: Compatible with d20Modern and Pathfinder core rules. 4e DMs may refer to the conversion table at the end of the module. Information on monsters and items not found in the core rulebooks is provided below.

Each encounter is divided as follows:

Encounter. Includes relevant background information and descriptions, including read-aloud text.

Role-Playing. Provides the reactions of NPCs, and possible directions to steer players.

Conclusion. Explains what needs to happen to conclude this encounter, and provides logical next steps.

Adventure Summary

This adventure takes place in four parts. In the first part, the party is invited to go on a remote tour to Barva Volcano in Costa Rica. Along the way they get to know their tour guide Enrique, learn something of the mystery surrounding the area, and encounter some of the very strange creatures that live in the region.

In part two they come into contact with a forgotten tribe of semi-aberration humans, and discover that getting away from this remote village will be even more difficult than getting in.

In part three they come face to face with the king of the tribe: a young aboleth sent to scout out earth. The creature demands a sacrifice and is hungry for blood.

The fourth part is free form, and provides different

scenarios for escaping the region.

Adventure Hook

Setup. When everyone is ready, read the following aloud:

You came to Costa Rica to soak in the sun and beautiful countryside. But despite the season, it hasn't stopped raining since you arrived. It's now Day 4 of your vacation, and you're growing disappointed as locals apologize with talk of climate change. At least the coffee is good.

Now in Braulio Carrillo National Park, you despair to hear morning rains batter the windows of your resort hotel room. Suddenly there is a knock at the door. It's Enrique, your enigmatic tour guide. Dressed in an I Love NY bandana, a tee shirt, shorts and flip flops, he smiles as you open the door. "Pura Vida" he says, giving you the customary Costa Rican greeting: Life is good. "Hope I'm not interrupting you. Looks like another rainy day." His voice lowers conspiratorially and he says in a joking whisper: "Listen, I've been giving tours for many years, and I can tell the adventurous type when I see it. I don't expect the rain to stop soon, but why not make the most of it? I'm inviting a small group to come and see Barva Volcano, at the top of a mountain not far from here. Sure it'll be muddy and wet, but along the way you'll get to see a village of people designated as a World Heritage site. What do you say? Will you brave the rain with me?"

Given the prospect of staying indoors and sipping coffee all day, you accept Enrique's offer and are soon tossing your bag in the back of his four-door Jeep. A few others on your tour climb in next to you and soon your guide is behind the wheel, splashing out of the resort compound.

Enrique

Personality and Description.

The party's tour guide should be played as a knowledgeable advisor, and should implicitly have the trust of the party. After all, they're paying him to show them the sights of Costa Rica, and he's ostensibly trying his best to do so, despite the terrible weather. He's constantly smiling, and always willing to help, or translate if needed. He wears flip flops, as is the custom for most Costa Ricans, as well as a bandana, which he never

removes – it covers a patch of scaly, inhuman skin.

His True Motivation.

In reality, Enrique is a native of the strange tribe on the mountain, and their ranking priest. He has sworn to return each year with a new batch of outsiders to sacrifice to the god of his village: an aboleth living in one of the ponds surrounding the remote volcano. He will keep up a good front, up until Part 3, when the party must face the aboleth. He is completely devoted to serving his god.

Enrique

Charismatic Hero 3/ Telepath 2

HP: 28, MAS 14, Init: +2, Speed: 30; Defense 14, Touch 12 (+2 Dex, +1 class)

BAB +2; Grap +0; (1d3 unarmed strike or 1d4 knife 19-20)

Fort: +4; Ref +4; Will: +6

AP: 3; Rep: +4

Str: 10, Dex: 15; Con: 14; Int: 11 (13); Wis: 11; Cha: 16

Skills: Autohypnosis +3, Bluff +11, Concentration +4, Diplomacy +11, Disguise +10, Gather Information +12, Intimidate +9, K (Current events) +7, K (History) +9, Profession +6, Psicraft +3, Read/Write English, Read/Write Spanish, Speak English, Speak Spanish.

Feats: Iron Will, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Trustworthy, Wild Talent (Far Hand), Guide.

Talents: Coordinate, Inspiration, Trigger Power

Power Points: 8

Telepath Powers (3/2): 0 – Daze (DC 13), Distract, Missive; 1st – Attraction (DC 14), Charm Person (DC 14)

Items: Pocket knife, spare bandanas, wallet with pesos, a compass, and an amulet.

Amulet of the Aboleth. This item, made of gold and shaped like curling tentacles in a rough circle, has passed through the generations in the possession of the high priest of the aboleth. It grants the person wearing it +2 to Intelligence, and a +2 to saving throws vs. psionics. DMs may include a down side to wearing the amulet, such as hearing whispers from the aboleth itself.

Part 1: Getting There

Encounter: Setting out

The party can warm up to Enrique and soak in some of the scenery in this encounter. He is warm and friendly, knowledgeable about Costa Rican flora and fauna, history, and customs. DMs are invited to skim an encyclopedia entry on the country to provide real details to some of the information that Enrique would be able to share.

You bounce along as the Jeep winds up the side of a thickly forested mountain. Aside from the supplies of the party, Enrique has packed three five-gallon containers of gasoline, two cases containing 40 lightbulbs each, 20 cartons of cigarettes, and a case of motor oil.

Fully stocked and packed with passengers, the vehicle bounces through puddles, scaring flocks of sheep and zipping by men riding burros heading who knows where. Enrique somehow navigates the numerous muddy side-trails that continuously branch to the right and left, choosing some almost at random, and occasionally turning around with a laugh. All the while he talks to you in his broken English, speaking of the region and the people who live here. “This mountain is said to be a sacred place. Up there,” he points a finger past the ceaseless swipe of the windshield wipers, toward the foggy top of the mountain, “Up there lives a people discovered not so many years ago. They’re called the Aboraeshionies (pronounced Aberration-ees). Their culture and belief system were so unique that the World Heritage Fund advocated they be placed under permanent protection. Only 100 or so outsiders are permitted there per year. Lucky for you, I have a pass. Pura vida!”

As the vehicle spins through puddles and over flash-streams, you brace yourselves against containers of gasoline and motor oil.

Role-Playing. Enrique’s insights about what the party is about to see are veiled but tantalizing. Feel free to intersperse any of the following into conversations that the characters have with their guide.

- The people living on the mountain are called the Aboraeshionies (pronounced: Aberration-ees). They were discovered in the 1940s and their culture is truly unique. (Australia has Aborigines, Costa Rica has Aboraeshionies).
- What you see up there may surprise you, but I’m your tour guide, and I can tell you it will be

worth all the money you spent on this trip to be able to witness wonders like this.

- The Aboraeshionies are curious of outsiders, though have no wish to change their ways.
- They resisted Spanish conquest hundreds of years ago, and continue their own ancient practices, though they did adopt a bastardized version of Spanish over the years.
- The Aboraeshionies have generators, and need of gasoline and other supplies. Enrique is friends with several of them, and obligingly delivers necessities whenever he visits.
- The king of the Aboraeshionies is one of the last true kings on this earth. I can only hope you will have a chance to meet him.

If asked about their religion, Enrique is vague, saying he doesn't know much about their beliefs. This is a lie, of course.

Conclusion. Once the party has asked its questions and has a sense of the dreary tropical scene, continue on to the next encounter.

Encounter: The Gate

A perimeter fence surrounds Barva Volcano, gated at only one or two areas and is always guarded. The Costa Rican government is aware of the strange creatures on the mountain, and while recognizing their scientific value, seeks to contain them so as to limit the number of curiosity seekers coming to visit the area. So far, they've done an excellent job.

The gatehouse is a single room structure with a door and two windows. There is a simple mechanism that operates the opening and shutting of the gate. The electricity of the fence can also be disabled at this guardhouse. The structure is only accessible on this side (the outside) of the fence. Inside the guardhouse is a pair of walkie-talkies, the lunch of the guardsman, a small black and white TV, maps of the surrounding volcano, a pile of books in Spanish, and a rifle with six rounds of ammunition.

You splash along, listening to Enrique spin tales of his homeland when a gate appears ahead. A small cinderblock structure with a corrugated tin roof sits next to a sliding, electric fence. A gate blocks the muddy road as it continues to climb through the rainforest. Rusty signs reading "Alto" and "Cuidado" dot both the guardhouse and the gate.

As Enrique brings the Jeep to a halt, a guardsman wearing a Costa Rican national guard uniforms step out of the small structure and into the rain. "¿Qué estás haciendo aquí? No los Americanos permitido. ¿Tienes papeles?" he demands. There is agitation in his voice, and he looks at you, obvious foreigners, with weary disdain.

Enrique quickly produces a sheaf of pink papers and begins to argue with the guard. After a few minutes, the men seem to reach an impasse. Soaked to his skin, Enrique slogs back to the Jeep and gets behind the wheel. "Impossible! He says he can't recognize my permits and won't let us through!"

Role-Playing. Enrique honestly didn't foresee this difficulty, and will quickly make a discreet recommendation that someone in the party offer the guard something of value. It's up to the players to decide just how they'll convince the guard.

The guard does not speak English, so characters attempting a Diplomacy check (to alter the guard's unfriendly attitude) will need to have Spanish as one of their languages, or else suffer a -4 to their check. Feel free to award a circumstance bonus from +1 to +4 depending on the type of bribe or appeal made on the part of the players. \$50 American dollars (for each character), or an offer of similar value would amount to a +4 bonus. Characters may also offend the guard with low offers, or a show of arrogance.

Be sure to make it clear that the rest of the adventure rests with the actions of the party, and encourage real diplomacy here. If all else fails, Enrique will use psionics to force the guard to open the gate.

Guardsman

Strong Hero 1/ Tough 1

HP: 15, MAS 15, Init: +1, Speed: 30; Defense 14, Touch 13 (+1 Dex, +1 class, +1 jacket)

BAB +1; Grap +3; (1d3 unarmed strike or 1d4 knife); Atk +4 melee (1d6+2 nonlethal), or +4 ranged (2d6 Colt Double Eagle)

Fort: +4; Ref +1; Will: +0

AP: 0; Rep: +0

Str: 14, Dex: 12; Con: 15; Int: 13; Wis: 10; Cha: 8

Skills: Craft (mechanical) +5, Drive +5, Intimidate +3, K (streetwise) +2, Profession +4, Read/Write Spanish, Speak Spanish, Swim +3

Feats: Brawl, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency

Conclusion. Once the guard has been bribed or otherwise convinced of the party's good intentions, he will raise the gate and allow them to proceed up the mountain.

Cell phones: When past the gate, characters will find that their cell service drops to nil, though apps on their phone still function.

Encounter: Stuck!

The party again continues up the mountainside and soon the Jeep gets stuck, allowing the characters to discover some of the peculiarities of the region.

If the trails were bad on the lower side of the mountain, here past the electrified fence they're treacherous. Given the amount of rain in Costa Rica lately, most trails have turned to gushing streams, providing Enrique no visibility to what he's driving over. You bump and bounce constantly in your seats. The minutes stretch on, and the passenger windows finally fog over.

Then at once the Jeep pitches forward and slams to a halt, throwing everyone inside against each other. Enrique cries out in the commotion: "My knee!"

All players must make a Dexterity check, DC 10. Failure means you suffer a minor bruise in the crash: 1d3 hp damage.

When damage has been resolved, read on:

Cursing in his native tongue, Enrique hobbles out of the Jeep. He returns in a moment, cursing and grasping a round pendant – hitherto unnoticed – that he wears around his neck, as though it gives him consolation. "We must have hit a big rock – I can't see much with all this water... and – Ow! -- my knee got banged up when we got stuck. I'm not sure if I can push. We need to un-jam the Jeep."

Outside you see water rushing around the bottom of the Jeep's frame. There is no way of knowing what's beneath the muddy torrent.

Role-Playing. Once again, Enrique did not plan for this obstacle. The Jeep has hit a particularly muddy spot and is mired. Characters will need to push the Jeep forward to get it free of the mud. Let them experiment and feel around in the water, emphasizing the time spent in doing so, as well as the driving rain. Before the resolution of this encounter (see Getting free below), stage the Slime Hound encounter.

If asked about his amulet (see his items list above), he'll only say it was a gift from his grandfather, and gives him strength.

As they strategize about to free the Jeep, ask them to roll a Spot check, DC 15. Those who pass the check notice a strange tree about 30' off the trail – something unlike anything they've ever seen before. It has enormous pods hanging from it, and a very peculiar shape. Most startlingly, it seems to emanate a low pitched knocking sound.

Conclusion. This encounter can end in one of two ways. Either the party figures out that they have to push the Jeep forward, and does so. Or, they notice the strange tree and go to investigate. It's possible that the party splits to accomplish both.

Encounter: The Slime Hound

Stage this encounter just as the party begins to work on freeing the Jeep. If the party is strong against the hound, feel free to add a few more of the creatures.

Putting your shoulders to the back of the Jeep, you begin to muscle it free of the deep mud it's stuck in. You feel it push forward, and roll back into place as the muddy water rushes around your legs. Just when you think you've gained some purchase, a strange sound catches your attention. You turn towards the source of a growl – grr grr grr – and it's not the Jeep's revving engine. A creature the size of a large dog prowls out of the jungle, baring its teeth. It resembles a hound of some sort, but its hair is missing, as are its eyes. Slimy green clusters dot its body, and filth oozes from its toothy mouth.

Slime Hound

Medium Aberration

HP: 4d8+12, 30 hp, Init: +1, Speed: 40; Defense 12, Touch 10

BAB +3; Grap +7; Atk +7 melee (1d4+4, 2 claws)

Fort: +8; Ref +7; Will: +3



AP: 0; Rep: +0

Str: 20, Dex: 14; Con: 15; Int: 2; Wis: 10; Cha: 4

Skills: Balance +2, Hide +5, Listen +5, Move Silently +4, Spot +6, Swim +3

Feats: None

Slime hounds may attack alone or in small packs, and become very aggressive at the smell of blood. Their bite can cause infection. Any character bitten must make a Fortitude save, DC 13 or contract Slime Fever, a condition similar to the effects of Anthrax, which includes a near-constant, ugly discharge of green ooze from the mouth for the duration of the sickness.

Role-Playing. Enrique recognizes the beast as a dangerous predator of the mountain, but will play dumb if the characters prod him for more information. He'll claim that there are many strange species of plants and animals here, but he has never seen any that were dangerous. This, of course, is a lie.

Conclusion. The slime hound fights to the death.

Encounter: Getting Free

Someone must be at the wheel in the Jeep to steer and accelerate. The person in the Jeep must roll a Drive check, DC 15, in order to get the vehicle free. The driver has two chances to do so before the Jeep is permanently mired. The people pushing from behind must have a collective Strength score of 35 or higher in order to provide enough movement. A Strength score of 50 allows the characters to muscle the vehicle free regardless of the Drive roll.

Role-Playing. Enrique's knee is hurt and he's unable to drive or push.

Conclusion. If the Jeep is freed, the characters can continue on to the next encounter by driving up the mountain, or park it in a safe place and investigate the nearby tree.

If the Jeep is not freed, the party has little choice but to go forward up the mountain, as Enrique cannot walk far on his own, and at this point the village is closer than the guard gate below them.

Encounter: Driving Up the Mountain

Once the Jeep is freed, the party can continue toward the village. But since Enrique has hurt his knee, someone from the party needs to drive. The Jeep is a manual transmission, and the road is crossed by many

streams, ruts and gullies.

The driver must roll four Drive checks, each DC 15. Each time he or she fails, describe some loud clunk or crunch sounding from under the hood: rocks scraping against the chassis, or water flooding into the engine. The Jeep will begin to run badly (bucking and stalling out) but will not break down – not until the party reaches the village and shuts the vehicle off. Keep a count of how many checks were failures, and add this number to the Repair DC that will need to be rolled in order to restart the Jeep in Part 2.

Role-Playing. Enrique is in pain, and is not much help navigating. He will gladly accept pain killers or first aid. If you haven't done so already, be sure to conversationally include some of the tid-bits about the Aboraeshionies from the Enrique section above.

Conclusion. At the close of this encounter, move the party onto Part 2.

Encounter: The weird tree

Characters investigate a strange tree that serves as a breeder for animals like the Slime Hound and even a few badly mutated humans.

Cautiously you approach a bizarre growth – it might be a tree, but is unlike anything you've ever seen before. Oozing pus from various cracks around the bole, the giant tree-thing looms over you. From its twisted branches hang several slimy pods – about the same size as a human infant, and eerily contoured with a round, head-like shape at the bottom, and small jutting angles at the sides, as though knees or elbows. The tree moves slightly, like it was blowing in its own wind. Every few moments, a slight knock sounds from inside the tree.

Characters can roll a Knowledge (Arcane Lore or Life Sciences) check to learn the following:

Roll of 7-12: The tree is real, but appears to be a strange hybrid life-form. You're sure you've never heard of anything like this on the Discovery channel. If Costa Rica had resources enough to fund a nuclear facility, you might suspect there was a radioactive dump nearby.

13-18: Slime pours from many cracks, indicating sickness, yet the tree seems strong and otherwise healthy. The strange patterns in the bark and knocking sound seem to indicate an otherworldly presence, as though the tree were taken from another planet, or influenced by something not from this one.

19+: There are definite signs of something extra-planar in origin here. The tree stretches and bends toward you, indicating it may even possess some rudimentary consciousness. Certainly the growths found upon it seem almost human. It could be some failed experiment of a human-plant hybrid. But who's experiment?

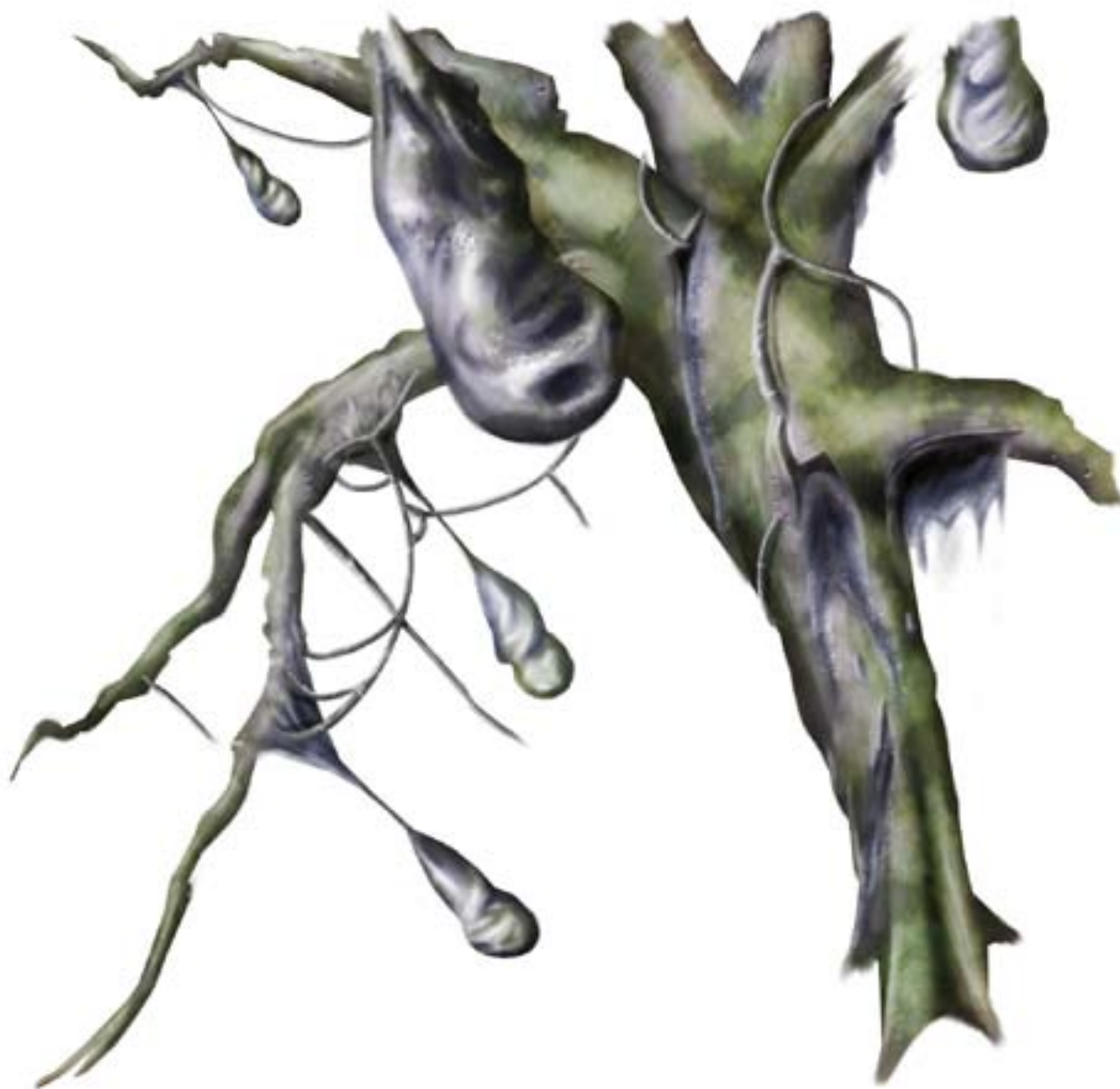
Role-Playing. Enrique will not want characters interacting with the tree, if possible, though injured as he is, he won't put up much of a fight.

Conclusion. Feel free to embellish this encounter with description as you see fit. If characters interact with the tree, it will bend and sway, though it can do no real harm. On the other hand, powerful parties may find

the weird tree is a proto-treant of sorts. If the characters cut down one of the pods, they should find no hard evidence that there are truly creatures growing from the tree.

Part 2: The Village

The characters finally reach the remote Costa Rican village in a deluge of rain. Enrique ushers them into one of the shacks lining the road, and they meet the first of the Aboraeshionies. The tribe has been living in seclusion since first discovered in the 1940s. Most of them look nearly human, though a few are quite malformed. They dwell in the jungle near one of the many crater lakes of the Barva volcano region. In that lake lives a



creature - one of a kind on earth - which has a distinct influence upon the surrounding land, and has even laid its seed in the local inhabitants. The creature is a modified aboleth.

Two hundred and fifty years ago a young aboleth came to this planet to determine if it would be an appropriate location for colonization. It quickly realized the effects of its influence on the people - its people needed a cleaner gene pool. So every few years Enrique is sent to bring back people to marry his tribesman.

One villager, Roberto, rails against the aboleth, and has been waiting for a band of outsiders to come so that he can gain some support against the creature.

Encounter: Entering the Village

Late in the afternoon you finally make the ascent through the cloudy, rain-soaked forest to a leveling of the ground. After several hundred feet the muddy road widens and houses made of tied sticks begin to appear on either side. The heavy droplets beat off the tin roofs as you move down the road. The forest looms thick on either side, but the mountain is less steep here, near the brim of the volcano. Ahead you see a man walking with a large leaf held over his head to block the rain. It takes a moment to realize that something about him is wrong... and it isn't until someone else in the Jeep gasps that you realize that the man is holding the large leaf with three arms.

"We're here!" Enrique beams. "This is the highest inhabited village in all of Costa Rica," he says in his best tour guide tone. "The house on the right is where we'll be visiting - friends of mine live there." With that, the Jeep finally dies, coughing and spluttering into silence.

Let players react before continuing on, and make it clear that the Jeep cannot be restarted unless considerable effort is put into it. See "The Jeep" below. If the characters decide to leave the Jeep for the moment and go inside out of the rain, continue reading.

Enrique ushers you into one of the nearby huts, which is made of painted cinderblock and thatch. It's clearly one of the nicest buildings in the village. Inside is lit by candles, and a comely young girl in a long tee shirt comes forward, offering a smiling "Pura Vida" to you each. She speaks no English, but quickly brings tropical drinks for all.

Enrique says, "Make yourselves comfortable, here we will wait until the rain stops." The guide takes one of the drinks and slugs it back appreciatively.

The young girl only speaks Spanish. Her neck is covered with scales, which are not immediately evident in the dim light of the home.

The Drink

The drink is actually a strong sedative and hallucinogenic, in addition to opening up the mind of the character to the aboleth's influence. Any character taking a drink must roll a Fortitude save, DC 15. Those who pass feel an extreme pain in their bellies that steals their attention. They are Nauseated for 1d3 hours.

Characters who fail the save lose control of their judgment, and suffer -6 to saving throws against the suggestions of Enrique and the aboleth for 1d3 hours. As the creature works its way into their minds, they also gain the benefit of one 0 level psionic power of their choice from either the Telepath or Battle Mind psionic powers list. Characters who fail the save gain 2 psp, and may immediately use their new power.

It should be roughly 4 p.m.

The physical effect of the concoction is like that of a strong alcoholic drink. Characters suffer -2 to Dex and experience mild hallucinations.

Role-Playing. Enrique asks the characters to relax - he promises to show everyone around the village once the rain passes. This, of course, is another lie. Obviously he will show concern for those who have upset stomachs, but he will secretly be looking out for the train of brides, coming shortly. He will keep up a good front - as much as his hurt knee will allow. He will try to soothe the characters into thinking that the rain will be over soon, and that they can explore the village or leave soon. If characters want to explore, or fix the Jeep, skip to Around the Village.

Conclusion. The characters can regroup, ask questions, and rest for a while out of the rain. They can also inspect the Jeep for damage. See The Jeep section below. Before play slows too much, move on to The Wedding Proposal encounter.

Encounter: Around the Village

This encounter simply provides details about the village, and provides situations to keep the party occupied during the afternoon. Be sure to emphasize the strangeness of the tribe, the fact that the Jeep won't start, and the constant driving rain.

The Appearance of the Villagers

Due to the mutative effects of the nearby aboleth, the villagers all have some kind of physical deformity. Below are some sample effects:

- Spots of green, slimy skin
- Scales around eyes
- Webbed fingers
- Additional or fewer than expected eyes, arms or legs
- Gills or small tentacles in random areas
- A small, malformed extra head growing out of

a random area.

Psionic Talents

In addition to the deformities caused by the aboleth, the villagers also gain a benefit: every villager has some kind of psionic power, and 1 psp. Treat any minor NPC encountered as a wild talent with one random 0 or 1st level Battle Mind or Telepath psionic power. Abo-raeshionies enjoy these powers so long as they remain within half a mile of their “god.”



Sights around the Village

There are really no destinations in the Aboraeshionie village. It is a long muddy road with huts on either side, and several dozen side tracks that lead to other homesteads and farms. The villagers should be treated as friendly to the characters, as long as they don't try to escape. Villagers treated kindly by the characters will be told the following (in Spanish):

- "You are in very special, thank you for coming!"
- "The king is very interested in you."
- "We are very happy you will become one of us soon."

All villagers (with the exception of Roberto) are loyal to their king over the characters, no matter what may be offered. Once the aboleth is fed, the villagers sense their king has been appeased and may be more willing to aid the characters, if offered valuables, or the characters convince them of their need.

Thugs

If the game needs some excitement, you may choose to throw in an encounter with a pair of Aboraeshionie thugs. They say in no uncertain terms that the characters are not wanted. Sample dialogue: "Usted no es bienvenido aquí! Es guapo? No por mucho tiempo!"

The thugs aim to rough up the party, but not do serious harm. They are unarmed, and will fight for a few rounds – until reduced to half hit points, before slinking off down the main road of the village.

Aboraeshionie thug

Strong Hero 1/ Tough 1

HP: 13, MAS 15, Init: +1, Speed: 30; Defense 13, Touch 12 (+1 Dex, +1 class)

BAB +1; Grap +3; (1d3 unarmed strike)

Fort: +6; Ref +1; Will: +0

AP: 0; Rep: +0

Str: 14, Dex: 12; Con: 15; Int: 13; Wis: 10; Cha: 8

Skills: Craft +5, Intimidate +3, K (streetwise) +2, Profession +4, Read/Write Spanish, Speak Spanish, Swim +3

Feats: Brawl, Low Profile, Great Fortitude

Special: Each thug has one of the following powers: Combat Precognition, Fire Bolt, Lesser Bioweapon, Lesser Concussion, or Lesser Body Adjustment.

PSPs: 1

Escaping the Village Prior to Part 3

If the characters try to flee the village before the climatic meeting with the aboleth, make it clear that the way is blocked by a mudslide, and that, at the moment, it is too dangerous to cross the slide without serious risk of having the Jeep (and everyone in it) washed away into a roaring mountain stream. The rain is still falling mercilessly.

If players insist, let them roll a Drive check, DC 30 to cross it. Failure means the Jeep is permanently stuck in a muddy backwater, and the characters are stranded in the village.

If any characters decide to run off into the forest, they must roll a will save, DC 18. Failure means they need to return to the village under the influence of the creature's suggestion. The aboleth will not part with new prey for some time. Otherwise, 2d4 villagers (use villager thug stats above) will give chase and attempt to drag the characters back, in order to feed the King.

It is entirely possible that the characters escape the Aboraeshionies. In this case, skip to the Adventure Wrap Up section at the end.

Encounter: The Jeep

Enrique neglects to ask for his Jeep keys back from the character who was last driving it, so the characters are still in possession of the keys. However, anyone trying to restart the vehicle will find that it doesn't turn over.

All of the original supplies that Enrique packed in the Jeep are still inside it, including the gasoline and oil.

As strange, deformed members of the village look on, the characters can try to troubleshoot the problem with the Jeep. A Repair check, DC 12 can fix the Jeep. However, the condition of the Jeep will be more challenging to fix depending on its treatment on the climb up the mountain. For every failed Drive check on the characters' part during the ride up, the DC of the Repair check increases by +1. If the character does not pass his roll, the Jeep does not start. There is no retry on the roll, and players cannot take 20. Other characters are free to make their own roll, or Aid Another if they are trained in Repair.



Role Playing. Roberto's Introduction

While the characters are working on the Jeep is a good opportunity to introduce them to Roberto. Roberto is one of the few villagers who is not loyal to the aboleth, and is seeking help to fight the ancient god. Pitting the party against a few thugs and then having Roberto come to help them would be a good way to earn their trust. See the Roberto encounter below for details on this NPC.

Conclusion. If the Jeep starts, then the problem is fixed, and it will start reliably again later. Enrique does not have a second set of keys.

Encounter: The Wedding Proposal

Here the village comes out in full force to offer the characters the hands of the pick of the village. Due to an ancient agreement, the aboleth conceded that the village must reproduce with outsiders from time to time, to keep the population from becoming overwhelmed by the genetic mutations introduced by the aboleth's presence. The characters are next in line to marry into this village.

You sit about the candle-lit cinderblock home-stead, listening to the rain crash against the corrugated tin room, and the sound begins to undulate, echoing strangely in your ears. It's at once hollow and full of texture, like the hushed rumble of the mountain itself throbbing at a pitch below hearing. You sit in a stupor of sorts as the afternoon wears on, when suddenly the door opens. An odd procession of young men and women begins streaming inside, nodding and bowing to you. Some of them wear white veils over their faces, others are simply dressed in their best clothing. All of them have some kind of deformity on them. One girl seems to have nothing but a quivering mass of slime for a face, another young man twitches violently, his arms too short for his body.

Enrique rises up, saying in his loudest, most official tone: "We welcome our guests from outside here today, and invite them to partake in the ages old tradition of selecting a bride or husband from the Aboraeshionie tribe. Welcome!" he says to you. "In renouncing the outside world you join a

family closer and more important than anything you can imagine. Choose now your new spouses, these are the women of your dreams."

Enrique will use his psionic Charm or Attraction on any person who has succumbed to the effects of the drink, identifiable by their lethargic state. Several of the young people parading about approach the characters, seeking to make a connection and pursue further relations if possible.

Role-Playing. Enrique very much wants the characters to get married off into his own tribe, rather than lashing out and stirring the anger of the people and the aboleth.

Each character who failed their Fortitude save is now shown the woman (or man) "of his/her dreams." Unless their companions can come up with a way to break the suggestion, the characters will be compelled to follow through with the marriage.

Conclusion. It's okay if some characters refuse or passed their saving throw. If characters try to dissuade their friends from getting married, several thugs appear to restrain characters from getting pushy. When characters begin to resist, proceed on to the Roberto encounter below. Otherwise, continue onto The Wedding.

Encounter: Roberto

Roberto is an unusual Aboraeshionie – he's the only one brave enough to openly question the rule of the aboleth. He's viewed as a rabblouser and drunkard, though more than a few other villagers secretly support his ideas.

Roberto is the son of one of the previous "outsiders" brought to the village to keep the gene pool clean, and he learned a few things about the wider world from his non-native mother. He feels that the people are all enslaved by the king of the tribe, whom none but the priests ever visit at the top of the volcano. He's looking to make a difference, or at the very least escape this miserable place, and sees the characters as his opportunity to do so. Roberto's description is in the read-aloud section below.

How to introduce Roberto: The Jeep

The characters should encounter Roberto when they're in trouble. If they're fixing the Jeep, then have several thugs come to rough them up, and then introduce Roberto as a villager willing to stand up for the outsiders.

How to introduce Roberto: The Wedding Proposal

If the characters have just been offered the hand in

marriage of young tribesmen and tribeswomen – and are refusing, then the villagers will begin grumbling angrily, and 2d4 thugs soon appear to take the place of the proposed brides/husbands. After a round of combat, have Roberto show up and fight on the side of the characters.

A short villager with a bald head and oversized tee shirt suddenly appears, taking your side against the others. A broad knife wound scars his scalp, which offsets a spattering of fish-like scales that run behind his ear and down his back. "Vete a casa! A estas personas en paz!" he shouts, swinging a short club menacingly at the thugs surrounding the party.

Role-Playing.

If given the chance to talk to the party, Roberto will warn them to flee – and ask them to take him with them. He doesn't know for sure what lives in the volcanic pond, but he's sure that it's a thing of evil, and not a true king. He will give them straight answers about the village, explaining that no one wants to leave, and everyone has unusual powers of mind. People fear Enrique, since he is in league with the mysterious king of the village, whom few can claim they have ever seen.

"You are in great danger! This place is cursed, flee while you can! I can show you the way!"

If the party is in the midst of pre-nuptial introductions, Enrique will see to it that thugs overpower Roberto and the party so that the wedding can continue.

Roberto

Strong Hero 1/ Telepath 2

HP: 22, MAS 15, Init: +1, Speed: 30; Defense 14, Touch 12 (+1 Dex, +1 class)

BAB +1; Atk: +4; Grap +3; (1d3+3 unarmed strike)

Fort: +6; Ref +1; Will: +4

AP: 0; Rep: +0

Str: 16, Dex: 12; Con: 15; Int: 13; Wis: 12; Cha: 8

Skills: Autohypnosis +3, Bluff +6, Concentration +4, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +8, Intimidate +3, K (philos) +7, Profession +6, Psycraft +3, Read/Write English, Read/Write Spanish, Speak English, Speak Spanish, Sense Motive +3

Feats: Brawl, Low Profile, Great Fortitude

Talents: Coordinate, Inspiration, Trigger Power

Power Points: 6

Telepath Powers (3/2): 0 – *Finger of Fire (1d3), Distract, Far Hand*; 1st – *Control Object, Lesser Mindlink*

Conclusion. None of the Aboraeshionies want to jeopardize the wedding. They also sense that the outsiders who don't get married into the tribe are destined to "visit" the Aboleth, and will not risk killing anyone who isn't getting married (though roughing them up is perfectly acceptable). Roberto will be restrained, but should escape when attention shifts to the wedding. During this time, Roberto will be gathering weapons and preparing for a fight with Enrique.

Proceed to The Wedding Proposal encounter (from the Jeep encounter), or The Wedding encounter (from The Wedding Proposal) once the characters are restrained. Proceed to Part 3 if none of the characters comply with the wedding.

Encounter: The Wedding

Night is falling outside. Regardless of whether a character is previously married or not, if they are under the influence of the drink, they will comply when Enrique suggests an impromptu marriage.

Enrique smiles, "You certainly seem made for each other. Let me see if I can be of some assistance," the guide says, ever helpful as night falls outside. From his pocket he withdraws a small black book, and only after he starts reading from it do you realize he has launched into a wedding ceremony.

Nauseated characters must roll a Listen check, DC 10, to realize that their companions are being married off, one by one. If they fail, they are oblivious to what's happening around them.

A Knowledge (Streetwise) check, DC 13, will indicate whether a character realizes that others have been drugged. Characters who are under the influence may not make a check.

Role-Playing. Enrique will quickly perform the ceremonies, one by one. Once complete, the characters' new Aboraeshionie spouses will obediently stay nearby, but will not interfere with their actions.

A Psionic Wedding Gift. If a character gets married, then they automatically gain 1 level as either a Battle Mind, or a Telepath. Grant them an XP award that puts

them in the mid-point to the following level. They will function as multiclass characters so long as they remain within ½ a mile of the aboleth. Once out of range, they lose the XP award and all psionic powers.

Conclusion. Once the weddings are completed, or it is obvious that the characters will not agree to matrimony, move on to Part 3.

Part 3: The King of the Tribe

This part brings the characters face to face with the disgusting king of the tribe: an aboleth residing in one of the volcanic pools nearby. The characters will be forced to at least parley with the creature - and perhaps have the chance to destroy it - or can again attempt to flee.

Encounter: The Call of the King

Ask each player who has not been married to one of the villagers to provide you with their character's Charisma score. Choose the character with the highest score first – the aboleth will target this character for its sacrifice (gender doesn't matter). The character must roll a Will save, DC 18. If that character saves, work backward through the party according to the next highest Charisma.

If the character fails his save, he falls under the Suggestion of the Aboleth, and begins to make his way inexorably toward the distant lake. The effect lasts 1d10+10 rounds. Read the following when a character falls under the creature's influence.

It is about a 2 minute walk from the village to the King's pool.

You hear a voice in your head, filling you with strength and hope that some answer can be found to unravel the mystery of this strange place. You make your way into the muddy lane and begin walking up the road, toward the peak of the mountain. It takes a few moments to realize that the rain has finally ceased, but you give little thought to the darkness, nor the small band of villagers who have come silently out their homes to follow you. Some light torches to guide your way.

If other characters try to prevent the Suggestion-affected character's movement, 2d4 villager thugs will intervene, so that the character can make his way unmolested toward the aboleth king.

If the characters succeed in fighting off the thugs, and are able to break the suggestion, then skip ahead to Part 4: Escaping the Village.



Role-Playing. You can secretly coach the suggested player to play as though he was not affected by a psionic power, but rather that he feels the answer lay ahead, and he wants to know the truth.

The villagers will act out of an impulse to defend the needs of their king, and by extension, the life of its food-source. They will fight to the death against the characters.

It is perfectly acceptable for characters to take the Jeep to speed the way – if they were able to get it started.

Conclusion. If the affected character makes it to the aboleth, move to The King. If the Suggestion is broken, skip to Part 4.

Encounter: Resisting the King's Call

Should all characters resist the aboleth's call, or dissuade an affected character from following the road toward the water, the village thugs will again jump in, physically dragging the characters, if possible, toward the lake.

Aboraeshionie thug

Strong Hero 1/ Tough 1

HP: 13, MAS 15, Init: +1, Speed: 30; Defense 13, Touch 12 (+1 Dex, +1 class)

BAB +1; Grap +3; (1d3 unarmed strike)

Fort: +6; Ref +1; Will: +0

AP: 0; Rep: +0

Str: 14, Dex: 12; Con: 15; Int: 13; Wis: 10; Cha: 8

Skills: Craft +5, Intimidate +3, K (streetwise) +2, Profession +4, Read/Write Spanish, Speak Spanish, Swim +3

Feats: Brawl, Low Profile, Great Fortitude

Special: Each thug has one of the following powers: Combat Precognition, Fire Bolt, Lesser Bioweapon, Lesser Concussion, or Lesser Body Adjustment. **PSPs:** 1

Role-Playing. Most villagers will let the thugs take care of the characters. None will interfere since they know in general why outsiders are needed from time to time. The thugs will fight until reduced to 25% of their total HP.

Conclusion. If the characters defeat the thugs, they can either go to see the king (though that is unlikely), or proceed to Part 4 to escape.

Encounter: The King

In this encounter the character(s) come face to face with the lord of the mountain village.

As soon as you reach the top of the trail you can see the glow of a distant torch. The path slopes down steeply in a great circular crater not far away, a green pool radiating its own light in the darkness. A wooden platform perches six feet over the pool, and on it stands Enrique, holding a torch and wearing a smile. "Welcome! Come here! I've been waiting for you!"

You approach and, before either of you can speak, the pool below begins to bubble and froth. In a few heartbeats, a strange shape surfaces from the water – like a great fish with tentacles and eyes cold and alien. A piercing voice fills your ears, emanating from the creature in the pool below. "Step forward, let me look upon you!" the fish-thing shrieks.

Enrique continues smiling at you as the creature surfaces. "Behold, our ancient king: The King of the Earth!"

Let the characters react or interact with Enrique before reading the following:

The water bubbles and long tentacles stretch up in the humid night air, glowing green with some strange, inner light. "Come in, come into the water now!" You feel an urge at that moment to leap into the water, but something makes you pause – perhaps it's the enormous alien thing in the water, or merely the twisted leer of your tour guide. Whatever the case, the suggestion doesn't ring soundly with your conscience.

The influence of the aboleth's suggestion only goes so far. No matter what, jumping into the water will appear an irrational idea to the character, effectively ending the Suggestion. Anyone nearing the edge will be in danger of being grabbed by the aboleth's tentacles.

Role-Playing. Enrique will urge the character to give

him or herself to the creature, speaking of what a great honor it would be – but never using the word "sacrifice." If the character begins to back away, Enrique will quickly grow irritated, lunging at the character to drag them toward the edge of the platform, where the king's tentacles can reach them.

Most villagers have never seen the king in its true form, and will shirk back, afraid in the sight of their supreme ruler. It takes 2 rounds before any of them will come back to their senses and aid Enrique. Once again, use the Village Thug statistics, but this time only 2d4 thugs appear.

Enrique

Enrique will try to push characters toward the brink so that the aboleth can grab them with its tentacles. Enrique's stats are listed earlier in the adventure.

The creature is young, as far as aboleths go, and its natural powers are diminished by the time it's spent on the Earth, a planet that seems to sap psionic and magical powers.

Roberto

When the party has made its decision to fight or flee, Roberto arrives to help them. He will bring weapons: 5 homemade bombs made of gasoline and beer bottles (Molotov cocktails, 1d6 fire damage), 2 baseball bats (treat as clubs), and 2 Machetes.

Aboleth

Huge Aberration

HP: 4d8+24, 42 hp, Init: +5, Defense 18,

BAB +4; Grap +9; Atk +6 melee (4 tentacles 1d6+3 plus slime) The aboleth will attempt to latch onto any character near the edge of the platform or the crater, using one of its tentacles.

Fort: +8; Ref +5; Will: +9

AP: 0; Rep: +2

Str: 20, Dex: 12; Con: 22; Int: 16; Wis: 14; Cha: 17

Skills: Bluff +11, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (any) +10, Perception +10, Psicraft +8, Swim +24

Feats: Improved initiative, Iron Will, Lightning reflexes, Weapon Focus (tentacle)

Special abilities: Treat the Aboleth's Mucus Cloud and Slime abilities as a standard Aboleth.

Power Points: 20

Telepath Powers (4/3/2/1): 0 – *Daze* (DC 13), *Distract*, *Missive*, *Far Hand*; 1st – *Attraction* (DC 14), *Charm Person* (DC 14), *Lesser Mindlink*, 2nd – *Brain Lock* (DC 15), *Suggestion*, 3rd – *Lesser Domination* (DC 16)

The aboleth has two major weaknesses. The first is that it is constrained to the pool. If its psionics and minions fail it, then it has no way to pursue the characters should they escape the pool area. The second weakness is that it is located directly below the platform, which is situated at the end of the village road. If the characters were able to start the Jeep, they could potentially drive the Jeep off the platform and crush the creature, or use the gasoline and oil in the Jeep to force it beneath the water. It's about 1/16 of a mile from the village to the pool.

Use your own discretion when creating the challenge for driving the Jeep into the lake, or using materials to scare off the aboleth. Since the creature is so close to the edge, it should not be too difficult for the characters to accomplish this.

A tertiary weakness is that the aboleth is very hungry, and in this state would accept any "sacrifice." Should Enrique (or Roberto) get pushed over the edge, the aboleth would eagerly seize and devour him, effectively freeing the PCs to flee the village without contest. Once it feeds, the creature will sink back into the pool without further repercussion.

Conclusion.

The characters must either satisfy the aboleth's hunger, destroy the creature, or break free from Enrique and attempt escape.

Part 4: Escaping the Village

In this part, the characters must simply avoid villagers and escape the Aboraeshionies through any means possible. This section is free form, since there are many different ways that the party could try to escape. Since the possibilities for escape vary widely, feel free to embellish descriptions as you see fit, using the village map provided. It is entirely possible that the characters escape the Aboraeshionies. In this case, skip to the Adventure wrap up below.

If **Roberto** is with the party as they stage their escape, his knowledge of the village and surrounding lands grants anyone with him a +2 bonus to skill checks.

Healing

The characters can find aid with their new spouses, if they have any. Feel free to make one of the newly married Aboraeshionies a 2nd level cleric of a traditional South American deity, willing to provide healing should the party require it.

Hiding

The characters can hide in the farm fields, behind houses, or anywhere they can think of.



Driving

If the Jeep needs fixing, use the DC listed above. If the Jeep starts, it is now possible to get through the stream blocking the road.

Chased

If Enrique is still alive, he will give chase with 2d4 thugs left at his disposal. The thugs will immediately think to look in the house where the wedding ceremony took place. The new spouses of the party will still be waiting there.

If the party is spotted, they will be attacked by Enrique's band. There is a 50% chance that any villager will tip off Enrique to the party's whereabouts if they've been detected by villagers.

Running

If any characters decide to run off into the forest, they must roll a will save, DC 18. Failure means they need to return to the village under the compulsion of the King. The aboleth will not part with new prey for some time. Otherwise, 2d4 villagers (use villager thug stats above) will give chase and attempt to drag the characters back to the village, in order to feed the King.

If the characters succeed in avoiding the villagers, and are still relatively healthy, you may wish to stage another attack by 1d2 Slime Hounds.

Adventure Wrap Up

Once the party escapes (with or without Roberto or their new spouses – if any), they will need to find their way to the bottom of the mountain, by Jeep or by foot. It is a 4 hour walk, in the darkness, to the electrified gate. Knowledge (Nature) or Survival checks, DC 15, will ensure they keep wrong turns to a minimum.

When they reach the gatehouse, they'll need to convincingly argue (again in Spanish) that they do not belong to the protected tribe, but rather are citizens of the "outside world" and should be let through.

The local authorities look the other way when it comes to tales about the tribe. Many Costa Ricans are suspicious when it comes to the Aboraeshionies. The group will find no Costa Rican willing to journey to the strange tribe living near the Barva Volcano. However, if they managed to defeat Enrique and have in their possession **the Amulet of the Aboleth** (see Enrique's description at the beginning of the module), it could provide a hook for future adventures – perhaps minions of the king may try to reclaim it in the future, or it may contain some dark influence that begins to haunt its owner.

Roberto can become a trusted ally to the party in the future, should they decide to stay in Costa Rica. He will seek out his mother's family, and try to bring national attention to the tribe where he grew up, despite all odds.

Constables

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